

## To Define is to Limit

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## To Define is to Limit

by [CodeBee](#)

### Summary

Karlnap High School AU with Jock!Sapnap & Nerd!Karl, and a sweater.

This piece was inspired by reidingrainbow's "Not in Love". Please show her own work some love - as this piece would not exist if it weren't for her's!

### Notes

It is not my intention to make any creator mentioned uncomfortable. If any of these creators express any discomfort with the idea of fanfiction or otherwise, I will respectfully take this fic down. Thank you!

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# Clouded Thoughts

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

If someone were to ask Karl Jacobs what love is, he could list all tropes known to literature. The love triangle, the fake relationship, the enemies to lovers, the childhood friends; all of which are novel worthy and rather fictional. He could tell the Webster definition of love, including the other eight listed on there, one of which mentions tennis. He knows a bit about tennis. Karl could even illustrate the chemical composition of love, where it can be manufactured in any lab, however an overdose on the combination of dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin can lead to literal insanity. The point is, he likes to think he knows what love is.

He is, as his closest friends George and Niki would say, a textbook. He's the typical smart kid with a SAT score that'll send him to any Ivy League. He spends his days reading up on the latest research article on ScienceDirect. Monday's paper involved climate models and whether or not they support current migration, not that anyone would ask, but if they did, he knew about it.

However, as much of a "nerd" he may seem, George and Niki would also mention that he's talented in the arts department. He knows music theory down to the T. He even shares a name with one of the most defined theorists out there, Karlheinz Stockhausen. His hands are graced with the ability to play nearly any instrument he can get his hands on, despite never having the time or room to take a band class. He's self taught, much like everything else he knows. But that's besides the point.

It's a Tuesday morning and Karl Jacobs is currently shoulder to shoulder with two bickering nimrods.

"I mean, if someone sent me a handwritten letter out of recycled paper and sealed it with wax, I'd be floating on a cloud, but here you are complaining," George says with a scoff.

George and Niki had been arguing back and forth over a certain love letter Niki had received in her locker yesterday. It was from none other than Mr. Wilbur Soot, who was arguably the embodiment of the word indie.

Niki rolls her eyes and answers back, "He does this for every girl he sets his eyes on, I'd be better off getting a text asking me to send nudes."

Karl giggles, he wouldn't know what that's like, but he can only assume that this is the only time it would be acceptable to receive one. The three of them cut the corner to the main hall.

"The next time you get a dick pic, you better call me shouting with joy as if it were Christmas morning," George teases before stopping at his locker.

Karl waves him goodbye as Niki mumbles an insult under her breath. It never bothered him that they were always arguing over something, in fact, he found it rather entertaining. It brought excitement to his groggy mornings. The two of them continue making their way down the hallway, weaving through other students.

"He's just mad that he isn't living the Victorian dream," Karl compensates, seeing as Niki still had her arms crossed.

"Okay, but he's snapping the football captain. What a tragedy," Niki groans.

Karl shushes her and looks around to see if anyone has heard. They were supposed to keep that private knowledge a secret - in fact, they weren't supposed to know, but any secret to one was extended to the three. The man they speak of was rather popular among the student body, however, Karl had not a clue of what he looked like, so he'd rather play it safe.

"Keep your voice down," Karl scolds. Niki presses her lips into a thin line.

"Sorry, sorry. It's just a shame he moved from Britain, is it too late to send him back?"

They've made it to their lockers now; they're side by side unlike George's. Karl shoots her a look mimicking a motherly tone as he opens his locker and slips his bag off his shoulders, "His return date was a year ago, sorry."

George had only recently become their friends, however, he grew onto them fairly quickly as Karl considers him to be one of his bestest friends, not that he had many, but still. Niki on the other hand, has known Karl since their wee years. As Niki would point out, she knew him before Karl even knew himself, and as little as that makes sense, Karl understood.

He's grabbing his books when Niki nudges him. Using his wrist to adjust his glasses, he notices two men make their way down the hall. His eyes fall on the blonde one. He wears his varsity jacket proudly along with his smile. A pep in his step, and a gallon jug of water in his hand, Karl's pretty sure this is the culprit to the snapchat scandal.

To his interest, though, Karl has his eyes on the other. To the man's left is a shorter, brunette boy. His jacket is draped over his shoulder, barely hanging on, revealing a navy blue sweater with a white collared shirt underneath. His shoulders are laid back, and his eyes are engaged with the conversation at hand between the two of them. He's closer to Karl and Niki's side, and Karl could ever so faintly smell the blonde's cologne. They finally pass by, but Karl's still following them until they're out of sight.

"That's..." Karl trails off, wanting Niki to confirm his suspicion.

"Dream and Sapnap. More importantly, the one George is snapping is the blonde one." She explains.

Clay, or more commonly known as his nickname Dream, is the captain of the school's all star football team. He's the one who George managed to get his snap after the game last Friday. How he did it, Karl will never know, but what mattered was that George got it and had been constantly in conversation with him. To Dream's dismay, George was asked to keep the exchange a secret. However, as Karl and Niki knew, this wasn't a secret to them.

"Dream and who?" Karl asks, not knowing the latter.

Niki shuts her locker, "Sapnap. You know, his best friend? George told us this, they're practically attached at the hip."

What George failed to mention was the fact that this Sapnap was... was something else. Karl didn't know if it was the cologne or the sense of style opposing typical jockwear that caught his interest, but whatever it was, it made Karl's heartbeat heighten a tad bit more. Before Karl could go more into thought about this "Sapnap", the bell rings, signaling that there was a minute before they'd be counted late.

Snatching the books he needed, he shuts his locker and speedwalks with Niki to their first block. He's convinced the sudden racing of his heart was from the fear of being late to class, but when he

makes it to class and slips into his desk, he can't help but wonder about Sapnap.

## Chapter End Notes

First chapter's always the toughest. It'll get better, I promise! Constructive criticism is always welcomed :)

# Spontaneity

## Chapter Notes

TW // None

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Eventually, the newly drawn pile of research papers, essays, and a project consumed Karl's mind. His planner had been filled to the brim with a never ending to-do list, and even with the addition of a sticky note and scrunched up writing, there was still so much of the day left.

That didn't bother him though. If anything, it excites him. It made his solemn days feel productive, and that made Karl happy.

With his pen, he quickly jots down his project's due date and roughly sketches a plan on when to work on it. He was good at that too, actually planning.

His teacher continues to go on about the project. Apparently it was going to be their last before the midterm. Students around him groan at the mention of a midterm. As much as Karl appreciated the concept of chemistry, he too wasn't thrilled about a midterm.

He'll have to pick out a date to focus on chemistry. Not that he absolutely needed to, his ability to retain information was incredible, but because part of his midterm went past the paper and into a whole lab. Now that's where Karl had to read up on.

Before she can finish, the teacher's interrupted by the bell. Those around him were already packed up and had gone within a blink of an eye. He was also eager to leave and join his friends at lunch, but he lost track of the time. Shoving his stuff in his bag, he greets his teacher a good day before leaving class. Lunch was arguably one of his favorite periods of the day, only trailing second to his ultimate pleasure, study hall.

None of his friends were on this hall, so Karl walks alone alongside others who didn't burst out of class. Turning in to the lunch hall, he's thinking about what he had to do for the day. With that in mind, he reaches for his planner in his back pocket.

Patting the back of his jeans, all he can feel is his cellphone. He tries the other pocket, nothing. At that point he stops in the middle of the hall and feels his front pockets just in case, but alas, nothing.

Of course, in his rush to get to lunch, he forgot the manual to his life in third period. Karl spins on his feet and with that he's sent back to where he came from. He mentally curses, and groans in response to having to return. At this point, the halls have cleared out.

He's ready to apologize to his teacher when he swings back into class, but doesn't when a certain sweater boy was sitting on his desk with Karl's planner in his hands.

"Karl! We were just talking about you." His teacher exclaims with a grin.

Karl immediately recognizes the boy from this morning. He was fingering through the pages, quietly skimming through weeks worth of Karl's plans; all of which revolved around school and the occasional family dinner.

"Oh! Uh, sorry, I left my," he makes eye contact with Sapnap, "planner. My planner."

Sapnap extends his hand out to Karl, handing him the thick book.

"For you," he says. His voice is quiet but confident.

Karl notices the callouses on Sapnap's hand, and more importantly, the ring that adorned it. It was a simple, silver band with some sort of engraving. He isn't able to read it while taking his planner, but it catches his attention,

"Uh- Thanks," Karl says warily. He looks at his teacher in permission to leave, but she says nothing. The silence between the three makes the tension grow. Waiting for a response, Sapnap's now looking at him as well. A moment passes by and Karl realizes he is to let himself out.

He mumbles a quick bye before hurrying out of the classroom. To say that was awkward was an understatement.

While leaving, he faintly hears his teacher mention his name again and then trail off. He can't help but think about what they were talking about beforehand. Why were they talking about him? What was so interesting about Karl Jacobs?

He shakes those thoughts out of his head. What use was it to worry about something as measly as himself? Besides, he was probably making something out of nothing.

Making it to lunch, he sits beside George who is in midst of conversation.

Realizing his friend had finally made it to lunch, George gasps, "And where were you? You're missing my story!"

He opens his bag to grab his lunch box, "I forgot my planner in third period."

George rolls his eyes, "You can't go one minute without that dreaded book."

Karl only shrugs and begins to eat his turkey sandwich, leaving the planner next to his lunch box.

Niki stabs her salad with a fork and begins to explain the story at hand.

"Apparently a certain someone asked George out on a date at the end of second period."

Karl's eyes widen and in his shock, he chokes, sending him into a coughing fit with multiple people staring at him. George hands him his water bottle and pats his back, meanwhile shooting glares at those gawking at his friend.

"Sorry, sorry- he did what?" Karl manages to get out.

"Could you be anymore obvious, Jacobs?" George groans in a low voice. Karl coughs.

He continues, "He cornered me after class in the men's restroom, held a knife to my throat, and forced me to accept his invitation to dinner"

Karl whacks him, "Seriously, did you say yes?"

It felt so fast to Karl, but he wouldn't know what was fast and wasn't in the dating world.

"Of course he said yes, you think he was gonna risk his life saying no?" Niki jokes.

Karl shakes his head, now taking another bite of his sandwich, "Well I'm happy for you. You'll have to tell us all about it"

George rubs the back of his neck, "About that..."

Karl can only help but swallow and roll his eyes. He could already tell that George needed something from him.

George grabs a hold of one of his hands, "Pretty please, will you come with me?"

Niki giggles, taking a sip of her tea and leaning back in her chair. She seems to be enjoying herself.

Karl waves off George's grip, "I am not third wheeling your date."

Only George would ask Karl to be his plus one to a date with the captain of the football team. With midterms coming up and the stack of work piling, he can't fit an appointment with George until the semester's over, or so he wanted to say.

"Pleeeeease, Niki already said no, and you owe me." George whines, not letting up just yet.

Niki wipes her fingers on one of Karl's napkins and smiles at him.

"You owe *me* if anything, and why can't she go? She's a better wing woman," Karl proposed.

"Because Niki is going to be out of town this weekend. Besides," George grabs Karl's planner from the table, "it says you are available Saturday from 7-8," he says smugly,

Karl snatches his planner and he can't help but look for himself. George was right, there wasn't anything planned for that timeframe on Saturday, but that didn't mean something else would.

"It's only Tuesday, something could come up between now and then," Karl lies.

With his luck, nothing would fill up Saturday, and as much as George is in debt to Karl, both financially and otherwise, Karl can't deny a friend in need of help. That won't stop him from negotiating terms that didn't involve him sitting in on their date, however.

"And if something doesn't... could you come?" George begs, his eyes glossy with aid.

Karl sighs. He can't say no.

"Maybe. If I do, I'm not eating with you."

"Fine... you could be a spy! A spy on the inside!" George jumps in his seat, proud of himself that he came up with the idea.

Niki laughs at the outburst, "then it's settled. Karl's going to spy on your date."

Karl interjects, "Hey, I never said I would. I said, maybe. I'll have to think about it,"

She waves her hand at him and zips her lunch bag, "He's coming."

They continue talking, now changing the subject to Niki's family trip this upcoming weekend.

Niki and George dominate the conversation while Karl just listens. It tends to be this way, but that's what made him a good listener. Besides, carrying a conversation made him nervous; he wasn't nearly as funny as George or as interesting as Niki.

They're complaining about how bad the traffic will be when Karl opens his planner to this week. He traces the Saturday box. Maybe it was time to make some changes to his normal routine. Spying on a date was a new one.

He pens down,

*George's Date @ 7*

What could go wrong?

Chapter End Notes

It's getting there, it's getting there. Let me know what you guys think! :)

## Novelty

### Chapter Notes

TW // Mention of physical violence

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*A lot.*

*A lot* could go wrong.

It was Friday afternoon now, and George, Niki, and Karl were going over the game plan for tomorrow's mission in Karl's bedroom.

"What if I get caught, then what?" Karl probes.

"Then you get caught," George replies, taking a sip from his mug of warm, earl grey tea.

Karl groans and slumps in his desk chair, "So when Dream threatens to pound my face in—"

"Hey, he's not like that," George cuts him off, "I'll have you know he's a peach."

Niki scoffs, "Yeah a peach who can definitely knock the living shit out of twigs for bones over here."

She isn't wrong. Karl didn't have an ounce of muscle on him, and compared to a football captain, Karl would stand no chance against a brute.

With a huff, George puts down his tea.

"You don't know what he's like," he counters.

"Exactly! So who's to say he won't threaten him," Niki reasons, backing up Karl.

He wants to believe George in that Dream was a nice man, but he's read too many books where the jock had a tendency to bash skulls in. Perhaps it was cliche and highly unlikely, and as much as he doesn't want to make assumptions about someone he's never met, he can't help but fear the unknown.

George pauses for a moment. He's got this look on his face, where his eyes are slightly squinted and his lips scrunch to one side of this face.

Tapping his foot, he suggests, "Well since you don't know him... how about we meet him?"

Karl scrunches his nose, "And when could we do that?"

Niki, who's sitting on Karl's bed, leans forward and rests her chin in her hands with her knees supporting her elbows. She seems intrigued.

George crosses his legs, “There *is* a game tonight...”

Karl’s never been to a football game, let alone know how the game even works. His dad has tried to explain the rules of the game before in the past, but it never made sense to Karl.

Niki chimes in, “That actually works out.”

Karl glances at her, and she elaborates, “We go to the game, you go down to meet him, and we follow shortly thereafter. From there you just introduce us as your friends.”

In his mind, it made some sense. All they would have to do is arrive looking for George down by the field. They wouldn’t have to expose the fact that they knew the secret either, it was as simple as meeting someone on the account of encounterment.

“Niki you leave in the morning, right?” Karl asks. She nods, and George claps his hands.

“Then it’s settled. We’ll go to the game tonight. I’ll text Dream and tell him I’m coming with a few friends so he’s prepared to meet me afterwards.”

From there, Niki and George left Karl’s place to get ready for the evening’s event. It was about four thirty and he would have to leave for the game at about six thirty, leaving him two hours to prepare.

For starters, he didn’t know what people wore to football games. So the first thing he did was look up on Google, ‘what to wear to a football game’. He got plenty of results for what one would wear if they had some sort of fashion sense, which was quite opposite of Karl Jacobs.

His closet contains plenty of khakis and button up shirts, with the occasional t-shirts George bought him to spice up his closet. To the right were pairs of jeans and behind those, sweaters and jackets. Karl continued to scroll.

What he gathered was that a common theme was layers, and since it was going to be cold tonight, he figured that would be the best way to go. Searching through his closet, he thumbed through his sweaters.

As he skimmed, he pulled and laid different combinations on his bed. This was probably the most thought he had ever put in an outfit, and part of him didn’t even know why he was so worried.

Perhaps he wanted to leave a good impression on George’s possible future boyfriend, but even then, what would it matter if Karl had a good sense of fashion? Or maybe he didn’t want to look like a fool at the game showing up in his usual attire. For as independent Karl is, he sure got nervous about what other people thought of him.

He looked at his bed. On it were two different choices, along with other articles of clothing he declared wouldn’t work tossed about his sheets.

He had tried to pair a sweater and collared shirt together, like he saw on Tuesday. Karl would never admit it to his friends, much less himself, but every now and then, he would think about Sapnap.

He would replay that moment in the classroom, where he had sat down and looked through his prized possession. Karl would rarely let anyone hold his planner, mostly in fear that the ink inside would smudge or the corners of the pages would rip.

Interrupting his thoughts, a few knocks were heard from his door.

“Come in!” He shouts loud enough for the person on the other side to hear.

His mother opens the door and leans against it, “When did Niki and George leave? I thought they were spending the night?”

In his state of worry for his appearance, he had forgotten to notify his mom of the change in plans.

“We’re actually planning on going to the football game tonight,” Karl admits, now looking at her instead of the mess on his bed.

She raises an eyebrow and steps forward, letting the door close behind her. “You’re going to the football game tonight?” She asks, wondering if she had heard him right the first time.

“Uh, yeah. George has a friend there he wants us to meet,” Karl answers measly.

“O...kay,” his mother replies skeptically. She notices the clothes laid out on his sheets.

“And these? Who’s the girl?” His mother teases, going over to his bed and feeling the sweaters.

Karl cheeks start to feel hot, he stutters, “No- No one. It’s gonna be cold so, layers, right?”

She nods and decides not to push further. “This looks nice,” she picks up a beige sweater with a plain white collared shirt, “who taught you how to dress?”

He didn’t have the confidence to tell her he was greatly inspired by the boy he spent less than a minute with.

“George suggested it,” he lies. His mother hums in approval.

She puts the top down, “Well, I’ll let you get ready. When do you leave?”

He answers her, “Six thirty-ish.” Looking at the clock above his door, an hour had passed. He couldn’t believe he’d been matching outfits for an hour already.

His mother places a kiss on his forehead, “Make sure you grab something to eat before you go.” With that she leaves.

Karl’s looking at himself in the mirror. Deep in thought, he notices the flaps of the button up peaking out from under the sweater. He decides to tuck them in, it looked cleaner that way. He understands why Sapnap would wear something like this, it instantly made his confidence go up while staying in his comfort zone.

He hears the honking of a horn, signaling that his friends were here to pick him up. Karl snatches a twenty dollar bill from his desk and rushes downstairs, grabbing his shoes from the rack as he did so.

His mother appears from the corner, handing him a protein bar, “Take this. And stay safe, okay? I don’t want to visit the hospital tonight,” she scolds.

“I will, I will. I’ll be back before ten tonight,” he promises her as he laces up his shoes.

When Karl gets up, her hands reach for his collar. She straightens it out, pulling the edges that were stuck beneath the sweater and laying them on the collar.

“There you are, now you’re ready,” she smiles and pats his shoulder.

Karl returns the expression and places a kiss on his mom's cheek.

"Thank you," he genuinely tells her. She waves her hands as to say go. Karl waves goodbye before grabbing the protein bar and slipping out the house. He makes his way down the driveway and into the backseat of Niki's car. George watched him enter from the passenger seat.

"Alright, alright, I see you, Jacobs" George teases, once noticing the not-so-Karl-like fit.

Karl feels himself start to blush. Buckling his seatbelt he replies, "Lets go, we're going to be late."

It doesn't take Karl to repeat himself for Niki to step on the gas. For as little as she was, she sure did have a heavy foot and Karl only waited for the day she was pulled over for speeding.

On the car ride there, George reviewed the plan to Karl.

"We watch the game until the end, I'll go down to the field and talk to Dream, and you two come 'looking for me,'" George air quotes with his fingers, "and find me talking to Dream. Karl, you will say..."

Karl completes the sentence, having run this twice before, "Hey where were you? And who is this?"

George replies, "Good, and I will say, 'Oh just meeting up with a friend, this is Dream' to which Niki replies..."

"Hi, I'm Niki and this is Karl. We're good friends with George," she's pulling into campus now.

"And that's it. I can handle the conversation from there," George turns his body towards the backseat to make eye contact with Karl, "Think you can do it?"

Karl nods, "I can do it."

Or at least, he was pretty sure he could.

Niki parks the car in front of the stadium. It was about twenty minutes till the seven o'clock game starts.

George unclicks his seatbelt, "It's showtime."

## Chapter End Notes

Happy holidays, and Merry Christmas to those who celebrate it! Do let me know what you think, my comments are always open for criticism.

## Lingering Touch

### Chapter Notes

TW // Mention of physical violence

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To say Karl was overwhelmed was an understatement.

He didn't realize how many people attended the games at his school. Each row was nearly filled to the brim; people pressed against each other like packed sardines in the student section.

It was also rather loud. With the band playing, and the crowd already excited for what is to come, there wasn't a dull moment in the slightest.

Karl ate his protein bar while Niki and George taught him the positions and the rules of the game.

“Dream’s the quarterback, which means he’s responsible for getting the ball to the people who run it across the field,” George explains.

Niki adds on, “those people who run the ball are usually your wide receivers, and that’s Sapnap and Punz”

Karl nods, he’s a little lost, but all he really needed to know was when to cheer and when to stay quiet. They continue to explain the rules of the game and the positions, including what warranted a touchdown or an interception.

Soon enough, he could see a wave of royal purple and white enter the field. He assumed this was his school’s team, based on the crowd’s cheers (that and Karl knew what his school’s colors were). From where they sat, he could tell who was who if he squinted.

Upon seeing Dream enter the field, George shot straight up from his seat, as well did most of the crowd, in cheering him on. Niki and Karl did the same in support of Dream.

Scanning the field, he could see Sapnap. He wore a white jersey with a large, violet, number 17 on the back. In his hand, his helmet. Karl took a mental note to remember he was number 17 and Dream was number 1.

On the opposite side, a sea of blue and white flooded the field. The crowd died down, and Karl felt the tension rise. George leaned towards Karl, “Clairemont High. One of our biggest rivals.”

From there the game had started.

Throughout the first half, Karl had observed how brutal the game could be. The tackles made by the other team sent his own flying back, and vice versa. At one point, Karl felt sick to his stomach watching one of the opposite team’s players get laid in a stretcher and sent off the field.

It wasn't all too bad though. Past the brutality and well, the overall goal of the game, he was accustomed to each play and what it brought.

At one point, the crowd went wild for a specific touchdown made none other by theirs truly, #17. From what Niki explained, Dream had made a pass unlike no other: from the twenty yard line, he had sent the ball flying to Sapnap, who was on the thirty yard line on the opposite side of the field. Then he sprinted it all the way to the end, scoring a touchdown.

The combination of the crowd, band, and players on the field expressing delight and utmost excitement made Karl's heart race. Even when he didn't know how phenomenal the pass was, with nothing to compare it to, he had a sense that it was the highlight of the game.

When he wasn't tracking down players on the field, Karl spent a good amount of time watching George react. Every time Dream made a successful pass, George would do a little jump and shout a variation of 'Let's go!' or 'Yes sir!'. It made Karl's heart full to see him so joyful.

He didn't know it was the end of the game until George had told him so. Their team had won by quite a lot, seventeen points to be exact. He doesn't know how they racked so many to begin with, not once paying attention to the scoreboard, but instead what was happening on the field.

George gestured a 'come on' notion to both Niki and Karl, letting them know to follow him down the bleachers. They did so, weaving through the people who still sat taking pictures and cheering about. Plenty were littered among the base floor beside the fence to the field, making it absurdly easy to lose George to begin with, especially when he was ecstatic to meet with Dream.

At the bottom of the rows, he can see Dream and Sapnap now with their helmets off. Sapnap's wet hair stuck to the back of his neck, and his jersey the same, equally drenched in sweat. He was drinking water, more or less pouring it on top of himself more than actually consuming it.

George instructed them to wait there while he got to Dream. Niki and Karl were to wait three minutes before 'searching for George'.

"Nervous much?" Niki asked, gesturing towards Karl's hands. He was playing with the ends of his sweater, tugging and pulling on any loose string he could find. It wasn't as if he was doing it on purpose, his mind was elsewhere.

"I guess? I mean, I want to make a good impression," he tells her. She only nods and stares off at the field with him.

George had dodged through the crowd and managed to get Dream on his own. Karl could visibly see George laughing as if Dream had told him the funniest joke in the world.

Niki nudged Karl, "time to go," she reminded him.

As they made their way through the sea of students, Karl could feel his stomach in his throat. Why was he so nervous? There was no reason to be so anxious.

Finding George, Karl took a deep breath before delivering the line he had practiced a hundred times before in the car and during the game, "Hey- where were you?"

Completely forgetting the 'And who is this', George answered as if he had asked.

"Sorry, I was just meeting up with a friend," he gestures to Dream, who was standing tall besides George.

“This is Dream,” he introduces him.

Dream stuck out his hand. They hadn’t rehearsed this. Karl internally panicked. Was he supposed to shake his hand? Or was Dream offering the little slap motion George greeted Karl in the past before? In the time Karl took to think it through, Niki had put out her hand to meet Dream’s.

“Hi I’m Niki, and this is Karl. We’re good friends of George,” she effortlessly shakes his hand with a smile.

“I’m Dream, but please feel free to call me Clay- or Dream, whatever you’d like really,” Dream replied with a smile.

With no one really calling him by his real name, Karl figured he would still call him Dream. It just fit; Dream. *Dream*.

George looked absolutely vibrant when he had heard that they could call him by his real name. It brought a small grin to Karl’s face.

Realizing the conversation went dry after their introductions, Niki changed the subject, “That pass to Sapnap tonight was insane! It was an amazing play,” she marveled.

“It *was* pretty amazing, if I do say so myself.”

Karl jumped at the new voice, not noticing that Sapnap had been in the area behind him.

Dream chuckled, “Thank you, Niki. Sapnap, meet George’s friends, Niki and-“

Sapnap finished for him, “Karl. We’ve met.”

He had made something so mundane sound intriguing, it caught Karl off guard even hearing it a million times before. The way his words linked together made him hear what silk felt like.

George cocked an eyebrow, “you’ve met?”

Niki chimes in, “yeah, you two have met before?”

Sapnap answered their question, “Yeah,” he rested his palm on Karl’s shoulder, “he forgot his planner one day in Chem. Found it on my way in.”

Karl glanced down at the hand on his shoulder. It sent waves of warmth down his body in contrast to the newly cold wind tickling his cheeks.

Hearing the oh so familiar tone of an iPhone ring, Karl watched as Niki excused herself while walking away to take the phone call. He wondered who would call her this late at night.

Dream turned his head towards Karl, “Y’know, George talks about you a lot.”

George hits him playfully on the shoulder, “I do not!”

Karl giggles. He’s not surprised George already told Dream about him, and probably also about Niki. Any story he had to tell most likely than not included him and Niki; it’s just the way it was when they were the closest friends they’ve got.

“Oh really?” Karl teases, “I hope it’s all good things.”

Dream chuckled, “Only good things, I promise.” With that, George crossed his arms.

George pouted, “Great, you’ve exposed me.”

Ruffling George’s hair, Dream shook the pout off his face, “Oh boo hoo.”

“I’m sure Dream does the same for me,” Sapnap assures George, shifting his weight to his other knee.

Karl notices Sapnap’s hand leave his shoulder. It’s absence makes Karl more aware of his surroundings.

“How long have you two known each other?” Karl asks.

Sapnap answers with what seems like without any thought whatsoever, “Since the womb. I haven’t lived a second without this idiot.”

Dream rolls his eyes, “Our moms are best friends,” he explains.

Karl hums. He feels as though he knew George since birth, although George only came around within the last year and a half.

He sees Niki return to the conversation, her hands in her pockets.

“Sorry to interrupt, but something happened at home and now I’ve gotta pick up my parents,” she apologizes.

Karl worries for her, “Is everything okay?”

She gives him a half smile. “Everything’s fine, but I can’t take you guys home tonight,” pulling her hands out of her pockets, she goes to give Karl and George each a twenty dollar bill, “Here, this’ll cover the Uber home.”

Both George and Karl refuse.

“No, no, go do what you gotta do. We’ll figure it out,” George says, taking her hands and moving them back towards her. They hated taking money from each other, no matter the reason.

Besides, for as much as Niki drives them around, she was the last person to be giving them money to get home.

Dream interjects, “I know it’s not my place or anything, but I could give them a ride- if it’s fine with you guys, of course.”

George looks at Karl for approval. Even though Karl’s only known Dream for less than five minutes, something inside him told him it would be fine. He would rather the both of them enter the car with Dream than just George.

Karl nodded, “That works, thank you,” he looks back at Niki, “please, call or text if you need anything, okay? Stay safe.”

She assures him that it would be okay before quickly thanking Dream and jogging to her car. Karl catches a glimpse of Dream whispering something to George.

Sapnap waves her a goodbye, “Do you guys mind waiting here for a minute? We’ve gotta get changed and then we’ll head out.”

Karl didn’t realize Sapnap was coming along for the ride. That wasn’t part of the plan. Well, the

plan that had been decided moments beforehand.

George waves his hands in dismissal, “Of course, take your time.”

With that, Sapnap and Dream jog across the field to the locker rooms on the opposite side of the stadium.

George closes the gap between him and Karl, pulling him to an empty bench.

He sighs, “Man, I hope Niki’s alright,” George runs a hand through his hair.

“I’m sure everything’s fine. She would tell us it was bad if it was,” Karl assured him. They fall quiet for a few minutes.

Wanting to lighten the mood, George elbows Karl, “So… when were you going to tell us you already met Sapnap?”

Karl recalled the events from that Tuesday, except he didn’t mention the observations he made. Karl didn’t know what he was feeling, but the touch Sapnap left on his shoulder kept burning in the sharp wind.

By the time Sapnap and Dream came out, most of the people from the stadium had left. Karl was still sitting on the bench with George. The temperature had surely dropped what felt like twenty degrees in the past three hours. What was once a warm, fitting, sweater, was now paper against the harsh wind, leaving Karl shivering.

George elbowed Karl to signal that they were to get up now. Doing so, Karl hugged his arms.

Sapnap led the way to Dream’s car, leaving Karl and Sapnap in the front of the group and George and Dream in the back.

The walk back to the parking lot felt like it could drag on for hours. Karl didn’t know what to say to Sapnap, and Sapnap was rather quiet as well.

They could hear behind them Clay and George, specifically George, who was giggling in response to something Clay had said.

“So,” Sapnap glanced at Karl, “first time coming to a game?”

Karl didn’t want to lie, so he answered truthfully, “Er, yeah,” he meets his eyes, “It was cool though! Really.”

Sapnap cracked a smile, “Just cool or…?” he teased. He elbows him lightly.

His demeanor made Karl feel more than comfortable, like as though they hadn’t just formally met tonight.

Karl scoffs jokingly, “Would you like me to say that it was more than cool?” he presses.

With lips pressed into a thin line, and eyes peering off to the upper left corner of the sky, Sapnap answered in thought, “I mean, I wouldn’t want you to lie but you’ve gotta admit, it *was* a pretty good game.”

Karl strokes his chin in contemplation to agree. He was right though, not that Karl would exactly know what distinguished a good game from a bad game, but what matters was that he enjoyed it. The real question was if the game would be as entertaining as it was without Sapnap or Dream.

That's debatable.

"Perhaps it was," Karl alludes, "Dream really popped off."

Sapnap bit his lip, "Oh really? And #17, what about him?"

They're now walking through the parking lot, Dream and George rather far behind them now.

Karl took a moment to respond, "I think he was alright, his luck was impeccable tonight."

The boy beside him hums and nods, "I wouldn't say luck persay," he starts, "there had to be some sort of skill involved, don't you think?"

The validation he sought made Karl's smile grow.

"I mean I guess..." he clicks his tongue.

Sapnap's head was still high, but his face was now more determined. His eyes were narrower and his nose was a bit crinkled, as though he was plotting in his head.

"Then you're going to have to come to another game to see for yourself," Sapnap concluded.

Though the rest of his body was cold, his neck and face felt rather hot. There was no doubt his cheeks were blossoming into a rosy tone.

He clears his throat, "I-If you say so," Karl stutters.

Now feeling accomplished, Sapnap is smirking, having won this conversation although it wasn't a competition.

"Great! Then I'll be seeing you next Friday," Sapnap beams.

With that, the confident boy stopped at a Jeep of sorts. It reminded Karl of the kind of Jeep you'd take to the beach.

Dream clicked his keys, unlocking the car. He and Sapnap went ahead and put their bags in the car before wrapping around back to George and Karl.

Karl's replaying what had just happened in his head. The certain brunette had just decided Karl's plan for Friday, and for some reason, Karl didn't bother having a say in it. He just let him.

Dream opens the passenger door for George, who thanks him quietly and slips in. Karl lets himself in on the other side, seeing as Sapnap walked around to his half.

His car was exceptionally clean. He would've been convinced it was brand new if Sapnap hadn't said what he said next.

"Dream's heater is broken, and his windows," he points to them, "are stuck halfway open."

Karl looks at the windows. He barely noticed their existence to begin with. From the corner of his eye, he sees Sapnap rustle around in his seat. Turning his head, he's faced with a sweater.

"You'll get cold," Sapnap explains.

Karl's about to refuse his offer when George vouches for Sapnap from the front seat, "If I had known we would ride with Dream, I definitely would've brought mine."

He notices that George was wearing Dream's varsity jacket now.

Dream groans and flicks George's shoulder, "I told you to keep an extra one in here just in case." He yelps, rubbing his shoulder and sticking his tongue at Dream.

Karl reluctantly takes the sweater.

"I swear it's clean, I just did the laundry," he assures him.

It wasn't that he was concerned for. His stomach churned, but not in a way that made him want to throw up. It was the way he held his breath accepting the bundle of fabric, and the way his fingertips tingled while his hands quivered. The interaction was faint, yet it left a scorching mark.

It was rather large on him, yet again he was significantly shorter than Sapnap and with less muscle. His fingers barely reached the ends of the sleeves, and the bottom hem laid on the midst of his thighs.

It didn't smell like his cologne from Tuesday. The scent was softer, and more like a wisp of lavender. It was delicate, like the morning after it rains. It pulled Karl.

The ride was relatively silent. After a long day, everyone was exhausted. Karl couldn't imagine how tired Dream and Sapnap were. With the amount of running they do, he was surprised Dream wasn't falling asleep at the wheel. Perhaps he was too occupied by the pretty boy next to him, who babbled on about how his day went, including the brief visit to Karl's home abode.

With half lidded eyes, Karl sensed the familiar turns to his house. The frosty air kept him up, but his exhaustion was slowly creeping to him.

He thanks Dream and Sapnap before slipping out of the car. George waves and tells him to say thank you to his mother for earlier's stay. They don't leave until he's in his house.

All the lights but a lamp in the living room are out. Looking at his phone, he realizes it's nearly eleven at night. Karl curses under his breath. He told his mom he'd be back before ten.

It was the first time that night he had even picked up his phone, noticing the missed messages from both Niki and his mom. Reading the previews, he could gather that Niki told his mom of the changes, and his mom still wished to know when he was coming home.

He quietly unlaced his sneakers and placed them on the rack before moving to the living room to turn off the lamp.

He's about to flick the switch when he hears shuffling from the couch. Peeking over, he discovers his poor mother curled up into a pillow. She must've fell asleep waiting for him.

He wishes that he sent a text or had even called her to let her know he was at least safe. The thought slipped his mind completely to do so. Karl would have to make it up to her in the morning.

From their closet under the stairs, he grabs a wool blanket and lays it over her. He wouldn't want to wake her up, but she'll know that Karl was home with the blanket. He finally turns off the lamp.

Karl slowly climbs the stairs, stepping close to the railing to avoid the creaks in the floorboards. He opens the door to his bedroom, paying little attention to the clothes from the earlier expedition strewn about the room. Upon swinging by his bathroom, he notices he's still wearing Sapnap's sweater.

He doesn't want to take it off just yet, but after a moment of peering into the mirror, he pulls it over his head, catching a whiff of the faint lavender wash.

Karl was sure he would see Sapnap again next Friday.

#### Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the wait on this chapter. it is longer than usual, and it contained more Sapnap content, so I hope that made up for the wait. Again, feel free to leave any of your thoughts in the comments. I want to know what you think! The next chapter will be out a lot sooner than the wait on this one. Thank you for all your support, I hope you all had a wonderful New Years and be sure to watch the Mr. Beast Rewind when it comes out!

## Crêpes & Breadsticks

### Chapter Notes

TW // None

This piece was inspired by reidingrainbow's "Not in Love". Please show her own work some love - as this piece would not exist if it weren't for her's!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

At nine forty-five in the morning, one could find Karl Jacobs in his mother's apron whipping up the softest crêpes known to mankind. Mankind being his household this morning.

He's working on the homemade crêpe mix listening to a specific playlist made for cooking. Whisking in the eggs, he's bobbing his head and tapping his feet to the beat.

Karl enjoyed cooking more than he did baking. He felt as though there was more creative freedom within cooking. Sure, baking allowed for gorgeous presentations and structures, but it was cooking that really let Karl mess around. He could add more spices without ruining an entire dish, unlike baking where an extra  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon of baking soda will cause it to explode. Maybe not explode, but one could get Karl's drift.

That morning he made sure to text Niki back. He made sure that she made it home safely, and if she was still going on a family trip this weekend.

Karl didn't bother asking what had happened. When it came to Niki, he knew she was more private than George was. Not to say that he overshares (even if he did, Karl didn't mind), but it was that Niki often kept things to herself.

She replied whilst Karl began pouring his mixture thinly on a pan. Putting down the bowl, he picks up his phone and reads what she wrote.

*Got home before midnight and omw with the family rn. did u and gogy get home safe ?*

Skimming through her message, he sent her a message back.

*Yes, I don't know about George, they dropped me off first*

Karl sets his phone down. If he didn't pay attention, he would burn the crepes, and the last thing he wanted was to have his mother wake up to the smell of burnt breakfast and disappointment.

He wondered about George. Karl's sure he made it back home safely. He was more of a trusting person than he himself had led on to be, however, Karl still wondered. He decides to shoot George a good morning text, even though it was highly unlikely George would answer before noon. George was not a morning person,

Besides, George had to have gotten home for his big date tonight. Well, their big date tonight, since Karl was attending as well. It nearly slipped his mind while he flipped the crêpe on the pan.

Karl doesn't understand why he's even going. As far as he knew, George and Dream were already

so comfortable with each other. The two's chemistry was undeniably growing stronger by the minute. Karl could tell his best friend genuinely had feelings for the other, and if Karl knew more about Dream, he was sure he'd say the same. Besides, they flirted all last night anyways.

*Last night.*

He thought back to last night. So much had happened. Perhaps it was his charisma, but Sapnap made him feel... different. Not in a bad way per say, but in a way that was new. Like a rock thrown on a new lake, the water rippled and disturbed.

The ghost of Sapnap's touch still lingered on his shoulder. Why? Karl would never know, but what he did know was that he returned home with plans for Friday and a sweater that wasn't his own.

He's pulled from his thoughts when he hears his mother behind him.

"Mmm smells good," his mother says behind him. Karl turns around. She was still in her clothes that she slept in from the couch.

He pulls out his earbuds and lays them with his phone on the counter. Lathering a crêpe in strawberry jam and cream cheese, he folds it onto a plate and slides it on the counter towards her.

"Good morning. Just for you," he says, pulling open a drawer and grabbing a fork and knife for her to eat with.

She drags one of the stools from underneath the counter and climbs on top of it.

"Thank you," she drags the 'ou'. She seemed to be awfully cheerful.

His mother begins to cut the crêpe into bite sized pieces while Karl makes himself one to eat with her. They prized anytime they had to eat with each other. With his mother working day the afternoon shift up until late morning, oftentimes they didn't share a meal until the weekends.

"I'm sorry," Karl starts, taking a seat besides her.

She looks up and furrows her brows, "for what?"

Karl had a soft spot in his heart for his mother, as most people do, however, Karl especially had one for her. He owes everything to his mom, from his birth, to that very moment, eating breakfast on a Saturday morning, he really owed it all to his mother. So it made him especially sad to let her down even in the slightest, but perhaps that's because a son's love for his mother trumps all.

He cuts up his crêpe, avoiding her eye contact, "I didn't text last night. Left you waiting," he tries not to mumble in shame.

She waves her hands, both of which held a silver utensil, in dismissal, "Don't worry about it, just make sure it doesn't happen again, you know?" His mother takes a bite and hums in approval.

He's surprised she isn't chewing him up for it, not that she has in the past, due to the fact that Karl rarely did anything to warrant her being upset, but because he felt like he deserved it. After all, she ended up falling asleep on the couch.

"Yeah- yes, I'll text you next time, and I mean it," he answers her. She nods at him with a grin.

"This is so good," his mother marvels, covering her mouth from talking while chewing.

Karl giggles, taking a bite himself he tilts his head from side to side, "could be fluffier," he

concludes.

She rolls her eyes and smacks his shoulder playfully, “Stop that, it’s better than I could ever make.”

He shrugs. His mother, although she would never admit to it, is an amazing cook. Karl learned practically everything from her when he was younger. Of course, with time, there seemed to be less and less opportunities to learn from her, so he took it upon himself to teach the wonders of flavors and textures.

They sit in silence for a few minutes, enjoying each other’s company as they ate their crêpes. It was moments like these that Karl relished in.

Wiping his mouth, he asks her about her schedule, “Are you called in tonight?”

With a groan his mother replies, “Yes. One of the girls asked me to cover them, and I knew you were going out to dinner tonight, so I took it.”

He felt a pang of guilt in his chest. Karl felt terrible about leaving his mom like that just as he did the night before. He can only hope that his departure tonight wasn’t the only reason why she took the shift.

“Besides,” she continues, “I owe her one. Where are you going tonight, anyways?”

“Um, Olive Garden, I think” he answers, getting off his stool to grab both their plates to wash.

His mother nods upwards as to say ‘oh okay’ and gets up from her chair. She’s got the blanket Karl put over her laid on top of her shoulders. He didn’t notice that before.

Karl begins to wash the plates when an idea snaked its way to the front of his brain.

“Wanna watch a movie before you go?” he offers her as she’s about to head upstairs to do what he assumes to take a shower.

With a growing smile and a wink, she answers him, her voice bouncing off the walls of the staircase, “You betcha!”

They had decided on one of their all time favorites, *Mamma Mia*. The two of them were curled up on the couch in their jammies with two wool blankets draped over them. A bowl of popcorn was between them, empty from the very beginning as they couldn’t help but munch on it within the first twenty minutes.

Throughout the film, Karl could feel his phone vibrating with messages. Not wanting to disrupt their time together, he chooses not to look at it.

His mother checks her watch and frowns. Karl realizes it’s time for her to go to work.

“Keep the movie playing while I get ready, okay?” She asks. Karl nods and she goes to change.

He figures now would be a good time to check his phone. He had missed eight messages from George and two from Niki. Niki only sent him two pictures of her trip. George had responded at about noon-ish, with a “good morning :D” and constant questions about whether or not Karl would attend tonight’s dinner.

Karl can’t say no. He keeps his word, and it wouldn’t hurt for him to treat himself to Olive Garden anyways. He replies with a simple, “Yes, I’m still coming.” George immediately sends him the

details of tonight, including the address and time of arrival.

By the time his mother comes back, the end of the movie was nearing.

“Alright, well, have fun tonight, okay?” She tells him, grabbing her bag from the chair next to their door.

Karl nods and opens the door for her, “I will, I will.”

She gives him a kiss on the forehead and from there she’s off to work.

With a sigh, Karl figures it was about time he gets ready for tonight. He doesn’t take nearly as much time picking an outfit as he did the night before, figuring that the point would be to not be seen. On his bathroom counter lays the sweater from the night before. Picking it up, he can smell the lilac waves from the pool of fabric in his hands. Karl felt as though he could drown in it.

He decides to bring the sweater with him. The next time Karl sees Sapnap, he’ll be able to return the article to him if it were in his car.

Coming downstairs with the sweater in hand, he notices the credits were playing. There was still a few hours before he would have to leave, but he wanted to make sure he was ready.

He figures he would spend this time completing some school work. The changes in his plans through a wrench in planner, so he was falling behind on schedule. Karl wanted to study for Chemistry. That midterm was arriving soon and he was still worried about the whole lab portion. Thus, he spent the rest of the afternoon researching into the formulas his teacher glossed over the past few months.

It isn’t long until Karl’s watching Dream opens the door for George from his car. Both of them wore collared shirts, but George had Dream’s varsity jacket from the night before on his shoulders.

As stalker-ish as it may sound, his eyes follow them as they’re seated in a booth across from a window. A few minutes pass by until he decides its time to go.

Karl twists the key from it’s input and pulls it out, turning off the car. Sapnap’s neatly folded sweater rests in the passenger seat for now. He slips out and clicks his keys.

It wasn’t as cold as he thought it would be, which is a plus because he didn’t bother layering up or anything. Weaving through the parking lot, he passes Dream’s Jeep. Dream had picked up George to take him to dinner.

Karl waits to cross the street as an old pick-up truck wheels on by. There wasn’t as many people as he thought there would be at Olive Garden on a Saturday evening. He found it rather strange.

Opening the door to the establishment, the aroma of fresh breadsticks greets him. A deep breath and his stomach growls on cue. He was so caught up in his studies he had completely skipped over lunch earlier. Karl could really scarf down a few of those now.

The hostess at the front register smiles at him. On her name tag reads “Cara”.

With a leather pad in her hands, she greets him “Hello! Party of how many?”

Karl’s mouth is open to answer her question when someone else beats him to it.

“Two, party of two”

## Chapter End Notes

I might've lied last chapter about updating earlier. I was sadly mistaken with the workload from the past two weeks, however, I hope you enjoyed this chapter. It is a little bit of a filler, but I can assure the next will be prime time Sapnap and Karl content. The next chapter already has a skeleton, so it shouldn't nearly take as long, but no promises D: As always, leave a comment or kudos however you please, and I will see you next time!

# Vulnerability

## Chapter Notes

TW // None

This piece was inspired by reidingrainbow's "Not in Love". Please show her own work some love - as this piece would not exist if it weren't for her's!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Whipping his head around, he's met with none other than the boy from the night before.

Sapnap.

It was Karl's luck that he'd get caught by the best friend of the boy George was on a date with.

The hostess smiles, "Sounds good, follow me," she begins to make her way down the restaurant.

Completely frazzled to what was going on, he follows aimlessly, wanting to sit down and question the brunette.

She seats them a few tables away from Dream and George, far enough away that they couldn't be seen but they could still see them. They're also in a booth seat.

"What can I get you started with?" She asks, notebook in hand.

Sapnap doesn't hesitate, "Dr. Pepper, please."

Karl blinks. He's still baffled about what was going on. He just decides to go with water.

When she leaves to fulfill their beverage order, Karl puts his menu aside and stares down Sapnap.

"What are you doing here?" He asks, well, more or less demands.

Sapnap smirks, "I could ask you the same thing," he looks up from his menu once and then back down, "How do we feel about an appetizer?"

Karl short circuits.

"Appetizer, Sapnap what-"

The waitress returns, handing them their drinks. Sapnap replies with a quiet 'thank you' while Karl stares at the boy in front of him.

"Would we like to start off with an appetizer?" She glances at the two of them.

Sapnap nods and answers before Karl could reply, "Yes ma'am, we would like the mozzarella sticks, please."

She nods and leaves to put in that order.

Karl's still staring at Sapnap when he hits the bottom of his straw against the table to pull it out of its paper encasement.

"I hope you like mozzarella sticks," Sapnap offers. Karl ignores that statement.

"Are you here to..." He trails off, waiting for Sapnap to confirm or deny his suspicion.

It's too much of a coincidence that the both of them were at Olive Garden at the same time with their own friends three seats away. The probability of that happening on its own was far too great to say that Sapnap just decided to have dinner now and here.

"I assume you are, so make of that what you will," he sets his menu down to meet his eyes, "but if you ask me, I think they're gonna be fine."

Karl feels his cheeks heat up. He plays with the end of his sleeve without breaking his stare, "Then why are you here?"

Sapnap's the first to look away, "I don't break promises," he picks a breadstick from the basket, "also means I can eat breadsticks, so I mean, who's really winning here?"

Karl watches him as he takes a bite from his breadstick. He could agree with that, after all, Karl's highlight of the night was going to be those breadsticks.

"And it's boring to eat alone, don't you think?" he adds.

He was right. At least they weren't both eating alone.

Karl nods and also grabs a breadstick, "You've got a point there, I suppose."

A smile grows on Sapnap's face. Wiping his mouth, he takes a sip from his Dr. Pepper.

They sit in silence for a moment, this time a little more uncomfortable than the night before. Karl thought he might have been a little too harsh earlier, but he's quickly convinced otherwise.

"I'm sorry if I'm, y'know, being a little... too forward, if that makes any sense," Sapnap apologizes.

Karl shakes his head, "No, no, it's just," he pauses to think, "I'm surprised to see you again, that's all." That was also true. For someone he only met a few days ago, they sure kept bumping into each other.

He sees Sapnap smirk, "I told you we'd be seeing each other again," he teases.

Karl picks up the menu to decide what he wants to have for dinner, "I didn't think it'd be tonight."

Last he checked, the next time they were to meet, according to Sapnap himself, would be the upcoming Friday of his next game.

Sapnap mirrors his movements, "Is that such a bad thing, Karl?"

He shivers. He doesn't know why it sounded so good hearing it come from Sapnap's lips.

"I guess not, Sapnap, I guess not."

The two of them spend the next few minutes looking over the menu, for real this time. Karl's between the chicken alfredo and a small pan veggie pizza. He wasn't one to eat heavy when he

goes out, many restaurants never impressed him enough to really love the food. It wasn't him being ungrateful, it was just the fact that he knew what essentially went in it that ruined it for him. The magic left when his cooking skills heightened.

The waitress comes back with the mozzarella sticks. He had nearly forgotten that Sapnap ordered an appetizer. She lays the tray between the two of them. Everything just smelt so good in the restaurant to Karl, but perhaps he was just hungry.

She takes their orders, and Karl discovers that Sapnap has ordered a meat-lovers calzone. He had decided on the chicken alfredo.

When she leaves, Sapnap offers him the basket, "Here, have some. I'm not gonna finish it all,"

Karl's about to refuse when Sapnap presses, "Please? I can't sit here and eat fried cheese sticks alone."

With that, Karl can't help but giggle at the fact that he had called them fried cheese sticks. He wasn't wrong, but coming from him it made Karl exhale in laughter. He complies and takes one, blowing on it before biting.

"So... I don't really know much about you other than the fact you're George's friend and that you went to your first football game yesterday." Sapnap states, leaning back in his seat.

Karl nods and a moment passes before he realizes that Sapnap wanted him to talk about himself, "Oh! Um, well," he thinks, "there isn't much to say" he says sheepishly.

Sapnap crinkles his nose, "I'm sure there's more to you than that."

Karl always hated questions like those. It always left him on the spot and unable to think of anything to say. He never knew where to start. Karl didn't want to scare him off. Taking a deep breath, he decides to go with something relatable.

"I like music," Karl taps his fingers on the table, "I play a few instruments."

Sapnap's got a toothy grin and wide eyes, "No way! I've been playing violin all my life."

Karl gasps, he's never met someone who's played a string instrument as he did, "Wait really? I played the viola growing up."

For someone who completely destroyed in football, Karl didn't expect him to play something as gentle as the violin.

"I don't have as much time now with football and all that," he admits, rubbing the back of his neck, "but once the season ends, I can switch out of weight training to take orchestra."

Karl can't help but smile, "If I had the room in my schedule, I'd take orchestra."

Sapnap glances down at Karl's shirt and back up again, "What's taking up your time?"

From there Karl had spiraled into a full length discussion on how he needed to wipe out as many 'harder' classes he can take. He didn't want to go to an Ivy League persay, but he definitely had the thought. Now what he wanted to do, that was the real question.

The waitress had swung by with their food mid conversation.

"Sounds like you've got it all planned out," Sapnap said, then taking a bite out of his calzone.

Karl shrugs while twirling pasta with his fork, “Yes and no, I still have no idea what to major in,” he admits, a little embarrassed.

Sapnap assures him, “Well whatever you choose, I’m sure you’ll kill it.”

“How would you know?”

“You give me the feeling that the impossible is possible.”

He couldn’t help but look down at his food. If he wasn’t blushing before, he was most definitely blushing now. His skin felt hot.

They eat in a comfortable silence, enjoying each other’s presence. The ambiance of the restaurant sets the mood, making it far less awkward to eat in front of each other.

Sapnap finishes before Karl does, wiping his mouth as he does so. He can’t finish his pasta, so he settles for half of his plate left. They aren’t left to conversate some more when Cara swings by again asking if they would like dessert.

The two of them agree not to have one and Sapnap asks for the check and a to-go box. She nods and leaves.

Karl reaches into his back pocket for his wallet. Pulling it out, Sapnap shakes his head and waves his hand in dismissal.

“I got it, don’t worry,” he says.

Karl can’t help but rebut, “It’s alright, I swear,” he starts before Sapnap interrupts him.

Clicking his tongue, he counters, “Please, my treat. Besides, I invited myself to your one-man dinner.”

There was no way Karl would let Sapnap take the whole check.

Karl scoffs, “If it weren’t for you I’d eat alone in an Olive Garden on a Saturday evening.”

He’s got his card out, running his fingers on the engraved numbers. Karl notices the same ring from earlier in the week.

“How about this,” Sapnap tries to compromise, “I’ll get this one this time and you can take care of the tip, deal?”

This time.

Karl didn’t know there would be another time.

He’s at a loss for words when Cara comes back with a to-go box and the check. Sapnap waves her over for the check and places his card in it. She leaves with the check book.

“Um- Sure, yeah, I got the tip,” Karl manages to stutter out. He’s still shocked with Sapnap’s last statement.

Karl packs up the rest of his chicken alfredo while Sapnap checks his phone. They’d been off their phones the entire dinner, which was a good sign in Karl’s mind.

Cara returns with his card and the receipt. Karl asks for the receipt but Sapnap only shakes his head

and tucks it into his back pocket. He feels a little guilty, knowing that the amount must've been rather large for him to not show him. At the same time though, Sapnap did insist he pay for it, so Karl was more at ease.

Before leaving, Karl places a twenty-five dollar tip down. The two of them are side by side leaving the restaurant. Sapnap opens the door for him, the cold air greeting the both of them. Karl mutters a soft 'thank you' and steps outside. He doesn't know where Sapnap parked, but Sapnap follows him throughout the parking lot.

Where once Dream's Jeep was is now an empty parking space, reminding Karl the reason why he was there at the restaurant to begin with: to ensure George and Dream's date went well.

Sapnap distracted him in the best way possible.

"I didn't even notice them leave," Karl admits, pointing at the spot.

For some reason, Karl didn't feel bad about it. Something in him told him that they were fine, and that their date went very well.

Sapnap stops with him and shrugs.

"They left like thirty minutes ago, I think." he recollects.

Karl glances at him. Sapnap knew they had left and didn't bother telling him.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Karl asks him.

He bites his lip and answers, "I guess I wanted to know who Karl Jacobs was more."

They stand there in silence for a moment. Karl can hear his own heart beat in his ears, the pounding shaking his head about. His hands were heavy, almost like anchors, making his knees weak and breath shallow.

No one has ever made him feel so vulnerable.

Breaking the silence, Sapnap clears his throat, "So uh, thank you for letting me crash your dinner." He's shifting from foot to foot, almost as if he was nervous.

"Yeah, um, totally," Karl replies.

Sapnap steps towards the opposite direction from where they were going.

"Good night, Karl."

Sapnap doesn't wait for him to say it back or anything, and instead turns around to go to his car. Karl can't help but watch him leave. He's standing there, dumbfounded about the night.

Before Sapnap can get far, Karl remembers he has Sapnap's sweater in his car.

"Wait!" Karl shouts after him, "I have your sweater!"

Sapnap turns around.

"Keep it! It's yours now!"

Karl's about to yell back when Sapnap gets into his car. He recognizes the car from earlier in the

evening. It was the same old pick-up truck that passed by him before entering the restaurant. There's a fog from how heavy Karl was breathing in the cold air. He was still standing there at the empty parking spot, a few cars length away from his own.

Shaking his head, he speedwalks to his car and gets in the front seat. Karl takes a few minutes to replay every moment of his dinner he questioned. From the sudden addition to what would be a lone stakeout, to the little comments that made Karl's heart flutter, and to Sapnap admitting to wanting to know more about Karl. It made no sense to him.

Unlike the night before, Karl returned home with a sweater that is now his own and a feeling he can't shake off. Worst of all, he doesn't know why, and he has a feeling that a quick search on Google won't give him the answer he's looking for.

#### Chapter End Notes

Two chapters in two days, Poggers! Not wanting to hit a writer's block, I decided to go ahead and write this as it came to mind. The development is starting, you guys. Let me what you think; comments and kudos are always encouraged, and I can't wait to see you guys in the next chapter. Thank you!

## A Morning's Ambush

### Chapter Notes

TW // None

This piece was inspired by reidingrainbow's "Not in Love". Please show her own work some love - as this piece would not exist if it weren't for her's!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

That night Karl could barely sleep.

After a hasty shower and a record breaking time for the quickest he's ever completed his nightly routine, Karl was eager to jump into bed and snooze the night away. However, that was deemed to not be the case.

Each time he closed his eyes, a reel of the dinner would play. Every attempt welcomed a new portion of the night; like episodes of a tv show. Karl spent a great amount of time just tossing and turning, trying to find some sort of comfort.

No matter how he laid on the bed -- on his stomach, his side, even moving the pillows to the foot of the mattress-- he was constantly interrupted by that certain brunette from hours earlier. It wasn't as if he didn't *try* to get the boy off his mind. He eventually gave up on sleeping, and he decided to make himself useful.

Karl figured cleaning his room would help him. He picked up crumpled up pieces of paper he missed by the trashcan and even wiped down his window and mirror. When it came to folding and putting away clothes, however, he was met with the reminder of the blasted sweater sitting idly in the passenger seat of his car. He refused to bring it into his room again, but even when it was outside his home, it still found its way back into Karl's mind.

Not wanting to think about the sweater, he quickly decided to complete homework he set out to do Sunday. Thumbing through his planner, he decides to work on calculus. His calculus class required a few textbook homework pages be done. It worked for a while, getting lost in his TI-84, graphing absurd equations; but it wasn't enough. He knew that, though.

Karl just met the boy last week, yet he was running laps in his mind. He scored touchdowns whenever he pleased, successfully getting Karl to break the lead on his pencil one too many times. He dropped his forehead onto the table, resulting in a nice thud. Not even the solace of homework could keep him distracted; that was a first.

So he shoved his homework aside on his desk and pushed himself away from his desk on his roly chair. Leaning back for a moment, he propels himself forward onto his feet. From there, he flopped onto his bed.

Karl stared at the ceiling fan above. It spun effortlessly, taunting him. There was no use trying to distract himself when everything brought him back to the root of his inability to sleep.

He only wanted to know why. Why... him? Why did Sapnap make him feel this way? Karl had

whiplash: one minute he's on the top of a roller coaster in the clouds, and the next, he's hurled miles into the earth.

It wasn't even Sapnap's fault. For all Karl knows, the boy could've just been trying to be nice; he was getting to know Karl for Dream's sake. That's what Karl wanted to do anyways, to get to know Dream for George's sake, but alas, look where that got him.

He didn't know what to make of it.

A few moments pass by as though he were waiting for someone to answer his thoughts for him. The ticks of the clock above his door filled the room, and on it displayed that it was three in the morning already.

A yawn followed as the next minute struck, almost as if it were on cue. Thankfully, Karl's system started to settle in for the night. Finally too, because who knew what conclusion he would come to on his own.

He just needed more time to think about it, that's all.

Karl wakes up with a jolt. It isn't his alarm he's waking up to, but instead a Facetime call from none other than his best friend, George.

He lets the phone ring on for a few more seconds before groaning and groggily picking it up.

"There we go- Karl, open the damn door, it's freezing out here!"

George is in frame, and behind him is Niki, who's waving her hand frantically as to say, 'rise and shine'. They're both wearing jackets, and Karl immediately recognizes the one George is wearing as Dream's letterman. What was it with boys granting other's their clothing?

It takes all of Karl to not hang up and go back to bed, but upon seeing Niki for the first time since Friday, he decides to agree to the sudden intrusion. Of course he wants to see George too, just not first thing in the morning. Karl hoists himself out of bed and travels downstairs to open the front door.

"You know there's a key in the flower pot," Karl says after swinging the door open.

George nods, "We know," he steps inside, "Niki insisted we not break and enter."

Niki does the same, except she wipes the bottom of her shoes on the floor mat before coming in. Of course she would be the one to stop George from committing a felony.

"Well, thank you," Karl closes the door behind them and shivers. The cold wind from outside has welcomed itself in the Jacobs' home.

It was odd to see them so early in the day; even if it was eleven in the morning -- which was far too late for Karl to sleep in till -- they never bothered showing up unannounced before noon.

"Sorry, for waking you up, by the way," George apologizes, but then quickly returns to what they came here for, "but desperate times call for desperate measures."

Karl furrowed his eyebrows. What did they need to tell him that warranted a morning ambush?

He's standing in the stairway when George gestures him to go up. Oftentimes, the two of them

would stop by the living room or kitchen to greet his mother. Karl guesses they knew she wasn't home as they were eager to enter his bedroom.

The three of them climb up the staircase and take the right, swinging into Karl's room. His room was the same as it was the night before: folded clothes on his drawer and calculus homework strewn to the corner of his desk.

George takes the desk chair in the center of the room, doing a quick spin before leaning back. Out of all places in Karl's room, George preferred the spinny, squeaky, desk chair. It was his favorite.

Niki sat on the edge of the bed with one leg crossed over the other. She, unlike George, did not have a tendency to return to the same spot each visit.

Karl's the last to make it to their triangle, choosing the head of his bed. He's still confused about the urgency to meet, but he chooses not to question it entirely. He assumes George will explain how his night went and then they all make a collective decision as to what the next move is.

And Karl was correct, kind of.

"As we know, Dream and I went on our date last night." George states, his leg now bouncing.

This feels like a briefing of a court case almost, perhaps a council meeting. Karl shares a look with Niki before collectively nodding. This information wasn't new, especially to Karl, who was personally there less than twelve hours ago.

"And..." George places his hands on his knees, "*we* know how much we really like him."

We.

Karl forgets George's love life is a collective effort from all parties. Not that Karl minded, in fact, it provided more a safety net being able to screen the boy his best friend was interested in.

George looks like he could hardly contain himself. Karl had a feeling that something good happened, perhaps an invitation to another date or the offer to hold his hand.

Niki was on edge as well. The calmness of George's voice contradicted the excitement radiating off of his body. There was a growing smile on his face, and as much as he wanted to make the announcement suspenseful, George was way too ecstatic to dramatize it.

George -- quite literally jumping out of his seat -- blurted, "He kissed me! He kissed me in his broken Jeep in front of my house!"

It was only appropriate to celebrate the matter by joining him on his feet. Niki locked her fingers in with his and bounced with George, and Karl expressed himself through a tight hug to the both of them.

The three of them cheered loud enough for the entire neighborhood to hear. If Karl's mother was home, she surely would have busted in the room to hear the good news too. She would also commemorate this time with them.

For a moment, they were just three teens, on a Sunday morning, celebrating a first kiss.

It takes them a few minutes to calm down and to finally understand each other's screaming. George is wiping his eyes from the tears threatening to spill over in excitement, and Niki is exasperated, catching her breath from all the yelling. Karl's feeling his cheeks, his cold hands melting the heat

brazing his skin.

“Wait, wait,” Niki says, taking a deep breath, “are you guys like a- like a thing now?”

Karl wanted to know too. What warranted a level up from the talking phase to the dating phase?

George shrugged and ran a hand through his hair, “I have no idea. If anything, I’ve got to meet his parents first, I mean, he’s got a sister I gotta please.”

That was fair. Karl didn’t know Dream had a sister.

“I just can’t believe he kissed me.” He says again, as if hearing it would make it more real.

They’re all smiling and all giddy-like. It was true, all three of them would be invested into the relationship even if two of them weren’t directly involved.

“Wait, wait,” Niki starts, “you didn’t tell us how the dinner went.”

Karl didn’t even realize that they didn’t even hear about how dinner went. He assumes it went well in regards to the reward of a kiss at the end.

George’s got this ‘oh’ shape on his mouth, realizing that he had told them the punchline before the set up.

“Right, right. Where do I start?” He thinks, taking a seat and begins his story of the night before.

According to George, and closely aligned to Karl’s previous assumption, dinner went wonderfully. Dream was the boy they all wished for him to be: he opened the door for George, pulled out his chair for him, and even complimented on his fit for the evening. It was the textbook definition of a pure gentlemen.

George explained how they went about dinner as they did in normal conversation; nothing was forced, and it was all natural. George found out about Dream’s home life, where he has two sisters, one older and one younger, as well as a younger brother. The four of them lived with their parents in the Meadows, an upper-middle class estate located near the school.

He also discovered that Dream and Sapnap truly were best friends since birth. They did nearly everything together growing up. This included daycare for tots, joining the computer science club in middle school, and of course, high school football. George noted that Sapnap practically lived in Dream’s house with a blow-up mattress dedicated to him on standby in the corner of Dream’s room.

Towards the end of their dinner, Dream offered to pay, and in contrast to how that scenario went down with Karl and Sapnap, George utterly refused and made sure that they were to split the bill. How he did it, Karl won’t know, as he was shut down and pulled for a spin with Sapnap’s comment insinuating that there would be another time in which they had dinner together.

Apparently, George hadn’t noticed Karl in the restaurant. Claiming to have been infatuated by Dream’s presence, he assumed Karl had stuck to his promise and had kept a close eye on the two of them. Part of Karl was glad George hadn’t seen him, only because he knew he would get teased about having dinner with Sapnap.

Afterwards, Dream drove him home, and upon leaving, quoted exactly from George, “Dream wiped an eyelash from my cheek, and then we were kissing.” Karl didn’t know to take a mental note of such a situation or not, but it seemed somewhat important.

“Then, he let me leave his car after I promised to ask you guys about wanting a get-together,” George concluded.

Niki and Karl shared another look. Of course they were to still be involved, and rightfully so, they needed to witness a first hand account of how romantic George says he is.

George continued, “So... Dream was wondering if we all wanted to hang out one weekend. To get to know each other a little better.”

Karl wasn’t opposed to the idea, no, but he doesn’t find being a third wheel again appeasing.

“Before you say anything, it’ll just be us, him, Sapnap, and maybe his other friend, Punz. Besides, he really, *really*, wants to know you guys.” he furthers his statement.

Perhaps a get-together would do them all some good. If this was going to be serious, they were bound to hang out eventually. Karl knew that George wasn’t the type to ditch his friends for a new guy, and the fact that he had invited them to each interaction with Dream outside of school shows that this wouldn’t be a worry for Karl or Niki.

Niki’s the first to respond, “I mean, if he *really* wants to get to know us, then I guess we really want to get to know him,” she says playfully.

Karl agrees, “Just,” he pauses, “let us know when so I can write it in my planner.”

George nods with a smile, “Definitely,” he lets out what registered as a squeal, “I feel like I’m on a cloud.”

“You look like you’re on a cloud,” Niki comments as she swings by him to ruffle his hair.

They spent the rest of that day together, just conversing as per usual.

Karl worked on the rest of his calculus homework as well as an essay for his literature class as they spoke. He was a pretty decent multi-tasker, only when he wasn’t too distracted though. As chaotic as the three of them could be, Karl believed they’ve gone through the burst of energy part of their visit already. He was halfway through his calculus homework when George asked about how Niki’s trip went this weekend.

She explained that her father’s car broke down on the interstate and she had to swing by to help him out. No one was hurt or anything, it was just that her family only owned two cars, one of which Niki used regularly.

She didn’t say much about the actual trip itself since, according to her, she didn’t want to bore the two of them with the details. Karl and George didn’t push it, and instead switched the topic to complaining about their own classes.

Eventually, though, they all migrated to the kitchen. Since Karl had woken up rather late, there was no use in making breakfast, so he prepared a few snacks for the three of them.

Food at the Jacob’s was always nice. No one ever left hungry or dissatisfied with their meal; his mother and Karl himself made sure of it.

He pulled out some leftover brie and placed it in a bowl to heat up in the oven. While that warmed up, he grabbed jam from the fridge and crackers from the pantry.

George and Niki had been over enough times to become accustomed to where everything was, thus,

by the time they turned around, they had grabbed plates and cups and set them up on the counter. George weaved behind Karl and snatched the pitcher of iced tea in the fridge before making it back in front of him at the counter.

“You never fail to amaze me, Mr. Karl Jacobs,” George said, pouring himself a glass and offering some to Niki and Karl.

He shakes his head and smiles whilst cutting up some pepperoni, “You could eat good too if you learned how to make something other than kraft mac’n cheese,” he teases.

He shrugs pouring Niki a cup, “Kraft mac’n cheese never did anyone dirty.”

From there they ate together in a comfortable silence, all too busy scarfing down the first meal of the day.

It wasn’t long until Karl’s mother came home. As always, she offered George and Niki to stay for dinner, but they politely excused themselves and figured it was time to return back to their homes having spent over five hours at the Jacobs’ residence.

Karl couldn’t believe the day had gone by so fast. He felt like he was still waking up from this morning.

After some small talk with his mother, mostly just asking how the shift at the hospital was like and receiving a quick story on how she had to yank a frog from someone’s throat, both George and Niki shouted a thank you and left.

“Didn’t know they were coming over,” his mom said before lathering some brie on a cracker. It had gone a bit cold now.

Karl shrugged and leaned against the counter, “I didn’t know either until they woke me up this morning.”

She hummed in approval before wiping her fingers on a napkin.

His mom was still in her burgundy nurse scrubs and hospital grade shoes. Her hair was tied back in a slick ponytail and wore a tired expression on her face. He offers to make dinner tonight, but his mother waves her hands as to say no.

Having been a long day at work, and Karl still having to complete his essay, they both agree on pizza for dinner. His mother orders half veggie and half cheese for the both of them.

Overall, though, the day had gone more well than Karl could have ever planned it to be. He did notice, however, that this week had brought more surprises and changes in plan than any week ever. For someone who insisted on planning up to the exact minute, he’s surprised he hadn’t combusted yet from spontaneity.

With that in mind, he realized that he was still to attend the football game again this Friday. Karl didn’t have to, per say, but something compelled him to do so. He wants to say that it’s to support George and his conquest for Dream’s undeny love and affection, but truth be told, another reason crept up his spine.

Sapnap had already decided for him a few days ago to come again, and as silly as it sounds, Karl wanted to go on his own accord. His own accord just so happened to match Sapnap’s as well, he supposes.

Karl figures that by the time next Friday comes around, he'll have a better understanding of what this whole thing was. This... feeling.

He was sure of it.

## Chapter End Notes

First thing's first: Thank you.

Thank you so much to those who are still reading, who have begun to read, and especially those who encourage others to read this piece. I saw on my FYP on Tik Tok this work being recommended, and that blew my mind! I appreciate those who are sharing this online. The support is absolutely overwhelming! Especially, the comments. I try to reply to every comment left here, because as you guys take the time to leave wonderful messages, as will I in replying.

Again, thank you, and I hope to update sooner. Feel free to drop a kudos, and I will see you all again in the next chapter :)

# Assistance

## Chapter Notes

TW // None

This piece was inspired by reidingrainbow's "Not in Love". Please show her own work some love - as this piece would not exist if it weren't for her's!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As far as Karl knew, today was supposed to be an easy day.

He managed to complete his literature essay after dinner last night; this time being more successful than the one before. With that, his calculus homework was done hours beforehand, so everything he really had planned for Sunday was done and over with, leaving Karl open for anything that would be assigned for today.

He went to school as any Monday would permit. George caught a ride with Niki and the two of them met up with Karl in the parking lot. The three of them weaved between the parked cars and entered the main hall.

The beginning of the day went as it usually did: the three of them walked about the halls, discussing their dreaded morning; dropped off George at his locker, to which a certain blonde boy was wandering about the area, presumably waiting for George himself; Niki and Karl grabbed their books and went to their Literature class together, and nearly fell asleep during it; then parting ways for their second class of the day. Karl's next class was Chemistry.

For some reason, Karl couldn't muster up enough care to fully pay attention to his Chemistry teacher's lecture. It wasn't that she was boring, no, she was quite the opposite.

Ms. Alyssa was such a lively person. She was down to earth, and more or so connected with her students. She was fairly young, at least, Karl thought she was. Her skin was smooth, not a wrinkle in sight. If Karl didn't know any better, he would've thought she were a student here, but she had mentioned that she's had two kids and had just celebrated her 15th anniversary with her husband. Assuming Karl could count properly, there was no way Ms. Alyssa was in her twenties; unless she had married at fifteen herself, Karl could guess she'd been a teacher for a hot minute.

Unlike his other teachers, Ms. Alyssa refused to be called by her last name. She claimed that it made her feel old, so from the first day, she made it clear that her students were to call her Alyssa and to add the Ms. in front of it if the title made her students feel more comfortable.

Today deemed itself to be a slow one, though, and Karl was sure everyone in the school felt it. Mondays in general were groggy, but for someone reason this specific Monday proved itself to be the slowest of them all.

His teacher gave up on lecturing and decided to assign a short assignment on Google classroom. He guesses she could feel the lack of motivation radiating off her students as well.

Even when the bell rang, no one bolted for the door. They were all just so tired.

Karl's one of the last to leave her classroom, again. He made sure that he had his planner with him, and even took an extra measure to place it in his bag rather than his back pocket. Karl's in no rush since lunch was his next period and George and Niki were coming from B Hall, which was practically on the other side of campus. He wishes Ms. Alyssa a good day before swinging out of the classroom.

He's almost halfway down the hall when he hears someone shout his name. And to think that he had finally gotten the boy off his mind, he turns around to see none other than Sapnap.

Karl's like a deer in headlights. He stops abruptly and turns around, Sapnap now jogging towards him.

"Hey," he says, taking a breath, "how ya doing?"

Karl breathed in his cologne. It wasn't strong, no, it was faint. It had a cedarwood type scent, like the type after it rained. He reminded Karl too much of odd, peculiar items.

He almost forgets to answer Sapnap's question, "Good! Um, been a slow day, though."

Sapnap exhales in agreement, "I felt that. Where're you heading to now?"

Karl's never seen Sapnap down this hall before, at least, during this class change. It was strange. Perhaps he just wasn't observant enough, but even then, he was sure to remember someone like Sapnap - for no particular reason, of course.

"Lunch, you?" Karl catches his eyes for a second. Sapnap's got this small grin on his face.

They're walking together, side by side, down F hall. Karl wonders where he was going.

"Me too, actually," he opens the door leading to the next hall, Karl mutters a small thank you before slipping inside.

Karl's never seen him at lunch before- quite frankly, he found it so outlandish that all of a sudden he was popping up everywhere. Surely he wasn't this blind to notice his presence till now, right?

They go silent for a moment. Karl's never been good at starting a conversation. It was always someone else who drew him in and he would just float about, occasionally giving an opinion on the matter. The only exception was probably George and Niki, but that was different.

Karl doesn't have to scramble for a topic when Sapnap continues.

"You got Alyssa, right?" he asks, having seen him leave the classroom.

Karl nods, "Yeah, you got her too?"

Sapnap groans, "Yep," popping the 'p', "this unit's killing me though."

Karl didn't find this particular unit difficult, but it *was* a little more rigorous than those beforehand. He gathered that the math was what made it hard since nearly all units beforehand had been more conceptual.

"Yeah stoichiometry is pretty hard," Karl consolidates, "it just sucks since straight after the unit test, it's the midterm."

They take another turn and the boy next to him groans, "The midterm. I'll be blessed to get a C."

Upon hearing him say that, Karl furrowed his brows. Sapnap knew how well Karl did on his classes based on last Saturday's conversations, but Karl never bothered to ask how he was doing with his own. Karl didn't expect the boy to be a genius, much less a prodigy, but he felt discomfort. Not discomfort as in disappointment, however, discomfort as in this need; this need to help.

It was second nature to offer his help. Karl spent plenty of days helping George acclimate to American standard math practices, seeing as the curriculum in Britain was far more diverse than it was here. He never minded helping George, and perhaps it's a little biased because George is one of his closest friends, but his volunteer work says otherwise.

Throughout middle school and up until about right then and there in the hallway, Karl tutored numerous people in their studies. He was just kind like that, and tutoring even came with its own benefits.

Oftentimes, they counted as hours for clubs, like National Honor Society and Beta Club. When he tutored kids in his grade level, he found teaching a shared subject strengthened his own memory with the topic, leaving him with less study time as he was teaching it to others. It was a win-win situation.

With that in mind, Karl answered the boy, "Chemistry's not your subject?"

Sapnap exhaled and gave him half a smile, "Yes and no, I just suck at sciences in general. Call it my weakness," he chuckles.

Karl bites his lip in thought.

Should he offer his hand? Was it too soon? He worried that it would be taken the wrong way. Karl doesn't want to make Sapnap embarrassed or anything of the sort, but it hurts Karl to see someone he considers, at the very least, an acquaintance, struggle.

Besides, George wants him and Niki to make an effort in getting to know Dream and his friends, right? That makes sense to Karl.

Taking a leap of faith (in that he didn't want to ruin any basis of a friendship they've got), Karl lets out a breath, "If- If you need any help, I'm pretty good at Chemistry," he pauses to wait for Sapnap's response.

The boy furrows his eyebrows and is looking down at him, "Really?"

Karl nods, "I mean, I tutor, so, I wouldn't mind it or anything. I just don't want you to fail- but it's up to you, of course, I know you're busy with football and-"

"Okay," Sapnap cuts him off from his pathetic rambling.

Karl's eyes widened slightly, "Wait, really?"

Sapnap chuckles and nods, "Yeah, totally. You're like the smartest I know, and if you're offering, I'd really appreciate not failing Chemistry."

Karl's heart pounded in his chest, in fact, it pattered so loudly, he wondered if Sapnap could hear it from up there. He wasn't expecting him to say yes, and even so to say it as willingly as he did.

A little shaken up, Karl replies, "Okay- Okay, then, um, I'm available at any time really," he meets his eyes, "whatever works best for you, of course."

Sapnap nods and thinks for a second, “I’ve got practice nearly every day is the problem,” he pauses, “but I’m free this Wednesday and the weekend, if you do weekends, that is.”

Karl pulls up a spitting image of his agenda in his head, trying to remember if he had any plans for the weekend or Wednesday. Considering it was so early on in the week, he doubted he had written anything in yet for then, and if he did, it was to be due dates rather than any outline to work.

He makes an executive decision, “Yeah! I can do Wednesday and this weekend- and we could do my house, or your house, or the library if that’s any better...” he trails off, awaiting for a decision.

“Is your house, okay? My family’s a bit loud and libraries are a little too quiet, if that makes any sense,” Sapnap asks.

They turn the corner. It’s only a few more steps till they enter the cafeteria.

“Definitely, that’s perfect,” he answers.

They’re right in front of the door when Sapnap stops and steps to the side, pulling out his phone. Karl abruptly does the same, confused as to why they pulled over.

“Here,” Sapnap offers his phone to Karl, and he grabs it hesitantly, “put down your number.”

Karl understands why he’s thumbing down the ten digits, but he forgets that they need some way to communicate. His hands are shaking, and he’s afraid he’ll drop the phone before he can give him his number.

He finishes inputting the last few digits to his cellphone and hands the phone back to the boy in front of him waiting patiently. Sapnap takes it and drops it into his back pocket.

“Cool, I’ll text you tonight for your address,” he says before opening the door to the cafeteria.

Karl nods, jamming his hands into his pockets. He’s about to walk in when Sapnap stops him, placing a hand on his shoulder.

“Thank you, by the way,” he retracts his hand, “I, uh, appreciate it.” With that, Sapnap waves him a goodbye before traveling down the rest of the hallway.

To say Karl was dumbfounded was an understatement.

He ignores the burning sensation on his shoulder as he makes his way through the dining hall. A lot racked his mind, most of which centered around the fact that Karl has never felt so... so like this.

Karl doesn’t know what this feeling was.

He knows how he should feel, yes, this should be the same as any other times he has offered his help. He’s had plenty of people over his house to tutor, and even had their numbers embedded in his phone in case they were in need of assistance.

So why was this any different?

He’s still troubled by the time he’s taken his seat in his booth.

This wasn’t normal, was it? The constant shivers down his spine- the way his hands shook- or the way his body melts from any touch.

It made no sense.

He's quickly pulled away from his thoughts at the sound of Niki's voice.

"Karl? You good?" She asks, taking the seat across from him.

His eyes snap forward, and in that split second, he decides to leave it be. He was to deal with it later.

"Yeah- Yeah, sorry, it's been a long day," he says. It wasn't a lie, per say. The day *had* been long.

Niki groans in response, "Tell me about it, when Mr. Blade gave us *another* essay today, I was about ready to lose it."

From there, he lets Niki do all the talking. She stops for a second when George swings by, taking his seat next to Karl and then resuming the conversation at hand.

When Niki's done explaining how their class went in Literature, George changes the subject.

"So... Dream was waiting for me at my locker this morning," he says all giddily.

Karl had forgotten the blonde boy had waited for him that morning. He tuned into what George had to say about it all.

Niki nods, "We saw, we saw. Did he walk you to class," she teases.

A blush starts to appear under the surface of George's cheeks, "Maybe... but that's not what I was getting at," he states matter of factly.

"Then what *were* you getting at," Niki prods, taking a bite of her sandwich.

George scoffed playfully and played around with his food.

"Okay maybe that's where I was getting at," he gushes before trailing off into a recap of the morning's entire walk.

Karl tried his best to listen, but George's words were getting more and more muffled as the sentences came out. It wasn't because he was bored or uninterested, neither of those were true. It was more like Karl had other matters poking at his brain, most specifically Sapnap drilling a hole into his cerebrum.

He ran through what happened again, rewinding the tape to see any sort of sign of... of something. He didn't know what he was looking for. Maybe something to suggest more than an acquaintanceship, or even a friendship for that matter.

He was nervous to battle those ideas. Karl didn't want to come to terms with what he was feeling, but by now, he thinks he knows that Sapnap makes him feel more than any acquaintance or friend has ever.

And if that doesn't scare Karl, he doesn't know what does.

He spent the rest of his lunch eating and partially listening. Eventually, he begins to grasp the words George and Niki exchange. They were still talking about the walk and something about the weekend when the bell rang for them to go to their next classes.

The three of them pack up their lunches and throw away their trash before going their separate

ways for fourth period. They all had different halls to go to, so neither of them walked together to their next class.

Walking alone seemed more daunting now than ever.

With no one to conversate with or even listen to, Karl is, yet again, left alone in himself. This time though, he realizes something he hadn't before.

Sapnap didn't have lunch.

For someone whose next period was supposedly lunch, and being mindful that Karl has never seen the boy eat in the cafeteria, Sapnap surely has some explaining to do. Sure, he could've gone off campus to eat, some kids do that, but the nearest fast food place was a hot minute away. The high school was built in an area to discourage students from eating outside of the school. By the time they got their food, it was the time they drove back that would become their time to eat.

It wasn't like he was eating outside either. With temperatures dropping rapidly as fall was approaching, it was far too chilly to eat outdoors - that and without a jacket.

Karl doesn't want to psychoanalyze anything. That just made him feel like a creep. However, he will admit that this was fishy behavior. He'll have to ask Sapnap about sometime soon. Perhaps, this Wednesday, since he was coming over to his house. Or at least, that was the plan.

Karl takes a seat in his next class, AP US History, pulling out his agenda from his bag and a pencil. Flipping open to this week, he quickly scribbled down a note for Wednesday and the weekend, filling up the after school slot for all three of the days.

He wasn't sure exactly if this were the case, but he wants to hold the slot in case there was something coming up for those days. Karl wants to assure he has the time to tutor the boy.

With that, and the 'tutoring w/ Sapnap' written down three separate times, Karl carries on with the rest of his school day as he did with any other day.

As far as Karl knew, today was supposed to be an easy day.

The day had deemed itself otherwise.

## Chapter End Notes

I realize that it has been past a month since I've updated this.

Apologies for that, hopefully the upcoming spring break will bring more chapters :( <3

I hope you guys enjoy this one - it has been a bit slow, I will admit, but it's starting to get a little more... more interesting, if I do say so myself. As always, feel free to drop a kudos or even a comment, and I will see you all again in the next chapter :)

# The Great Gatsby

## Chapter Notes

TW // None

### SPOILERS FOR THE GREAT GATSBY

This piece was inspired by reidingrainbow's "Not in Love". Please show her own work some love - as this piece would not exist if it weren't for her's!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As much as he hated to admit it, after Karl got off from school, he found himself waiting on his phone for a text from Sapnap.

It wasn't like he was standing by the messages app, staring intently at the screen for a message from an unknown number to pop off. It was more like checking his phone and creating reasons as to why he's checking his phone.

The most recent one was to take note of the weather, although he had just done so less than an hour ago. The temperature hasn't changed, but Karl could've told you that *without* opening the weather app.

It was then when he decided that he was getting too distracted, so he put his phone up on his dresser.

Karl sighs and collapses on his bed, gazing into the ceiling as though it was going to have the answers he needed.

He knew he had homework, not much of it, but enough that would surely take his mind off of the matter at hand. For once, Karl just didn't want to do it. He was going to do it, of course, he wasn't *that* reckless. Karl just didn't want to sit down and do it right then and there.

He lays there for a moment, watching the fan above him whir relentlessly. Even if it were cold, he still kept his fan on. Without it, the room was too silent, and more often than not, the ticking of his clock would drive him insane.

His moment is interrupted by the sound of his phone going off. Karl shoots out of his bed like a rocket, propelling himself towards the dresser, snatching his phone and reading the preview.

It was just a message from George. He decides to read it anyway, not wanting to ignore his best friend for some guy.

Karl shivers at that thought.

*Some guy.*

He didn't like that wording.

Karl opens up the text to see he had sent something to the group chat between him and Niki. It was a picture of him and Dream in the jeep. Dream had taken it, almost as if he had stolen it, judging by

George's flushed face and his hand reaching towards the camera. They're both midlaughter, and it's slightly blurred in its motion.

Karl admires the photo, not in a weird way, but in a way that made his heart full. All he could ever want is for his friends to be happy, especially George, who, before the past week, had been admiring the boy from afar.

As far as Karl knew, Dream was everything George sought for in a boy. He was tall, blonde, built; all the physical features George was drawn to. However, he was much more than his wavy-length hair and broad shoulders, he was charming and amiable. At least, in the short time George has spent with him, and an even shorter time for Karl, Dream possessed these qualities.

If anything, Dream had proven the football stereotype false, so far.

He clicks off the photo to see that Niki replied.

*Georgeeeeeee*

Karl rolls his eyes and clicks off the messaging app. He places his phone back down, not wanting to be sucked into the new routine of waiting for a message.

He would say he could be at practice, but Dream wasn't even at practice at the moment, and he was the captain.

Karl was getting a little too impatient for his liking.

He decides to leave his phone in his room and go to his car. It had gotten a little messy over the course of the week, so he figured he might as well do some cleaning while he waits.

Karl snatches an empty laundry basket and makes his way down the stairs. He opens the door and swings right on out, holding the basket to his hip like a mother would.

Clicking his keys, he begins from the backseat, picking up wrappers and empty water bottles. He finds old papers that escaped his backpack, as well as, oddly enough, paper bags from his last grocery trip. He doesn't know how they remained, meaning that at one point he grabbed the contents rather than the bag itself.

He chooses not to dwell on it.

Karl goes to the passenger seat of the car to retrieve an old coffee cup when he notices that Sapnap's sweater was still in the car. It had slipped onto the floor sometime that day, seeing as Karl didn't remember it from earlier that morning.

He picks it up slowly, like as though if he were to drop it, it'd shatter. It was delicate in Karl's hands.

He had nearly forgotten that it was now his, although, right then and there in that moment, it felt foreign again. There's an impulse to smell it, wondering if it held that lavender wisp still. Bringing it closer to his face, he hesitates and decides against it.

Was it creepy to want to smell the sweater? It was his now, after all. Perhaps not in public, at least, he tries to convince himself. Picking up the laundry basket, he drapes the sweater over his shoulder and closes his car doors, locking it in the process.

Upon reaching his home abode, he slips back inside and leaves the basket next to the shoe rack.

Karl grabs the sweater from his shoulder and races up the stairs to his room, where he is met face to face with himself in his mirror.

He holds out the sweater, admiring the way it was far too big for Karl, yet the perfect size for the garment. For as much as he tried to stuff it away and keep it out of sight, Karl sure went against such. In that moment, he was infatuated by the piece, and he had no idea why.

That was, until his phone dinged, and he gently laid the sweater down on his bedside table and crossed over to the dresser to retrieve his phone. Turning it on, he noticed that the message was from an unknown number, and he can only guess it was from none other than the culprit, Sapnap.

He opens his messages and reads what he sent.

*hey this is sapnap :)*

Karl returns the smile physically, taking a seat at his desk. He waits a moment before typing back.

*Hi!! This is Karl*

His thumb hovers over the send button. Was he coming off too strong with the exclamation marks? Should he too send a smile back?

He shakes his head and sends it anyway. Karl figures the boy wouldn't care how he texted. Besides, this was for tutoring, after all.

Almost immediately, with his phone still on in his hand, he notices Sapnap was in the midst of replying. The three dots were staggering as he waited patiently.

*is wednesday after school still good?*

Karl figures he could answer just as quickly.

*As long as it's cool with you*

He cringes both on the inside and outside. Karl deletes what he wrote and rewrites his text.

*Yep*

He goes ahead and sends his address, putting a ' :) ' at the end. Karl gets a response almost immediately.

*thanks! see you then*

Karl responds similarly, and then places his phone face down onto his bed. He couldn't be more excited to tutor in his life.

By the time Wednesday arrived, Karl had spent every other moment thinking about how it would go down. He fears that he would come too straight forward asking Sapnap to follow him into his bedroom, or if asking him to not eat on his bed would be rude. There were too many factors involved with inviting a boy over- to tutor, that is.

Currently, Karl Jacobs is home alone, pacing his living room, patiently waiting for the boy to show up. He made sure to have study material ready on his desk upstairs, as well as an arsenal of snacks and beverages available at his disposal in the kitchen.

He's not one to pace, really, but he couldn't sit still. Karl was running through the formulas in his head like flash cards when he heard a car pull up in his driveway.

He rushes to his curtains and peeks out, noticing the familiar pick up truck and the boy coming out of it. He had his backpack slung on one shoulder as he put his keys back into his pocket.

Karl took a deep breath. He feels nervous, not because he didn't know the material (he was rather well versed in Chemistry) but because it was *him*.

The doorbell rings, and Karl waits a few moments before stepping towards the door. He twists the knob and pulls, revealing the man behind the door.

"Hey," Karl says, standing in the doorway.

Sapnap smiles, "Hey."

If Karl didn't know any better, he could've stood there and stared at the boy in front of him. The ring he wore catches his eye; it was the same from the first real conversation they had.

However, Karl *did* know better, so he stepped out of the way and off to the side to let him in, opening the door wider in the process.

Sapnap says a quick 'thank you' as he comes in. He takes a few steps into the house before Karl closes the door. Sapnap looks around before speaking.

"Is it cool if I leave my shoes here?" he asks, gesturing next to the shoe rack.

Karl takes a moment to answer, not fully registering the question at first, "yeah, of course."

Sapnap takes a seat one the stairs and unlaces his shoes. It was nice to know he was considerate of not wearing shoes inside the house; it was a pet peeve of Karl's to do so.

Karl looked away from Sapnap, not wanting to make awkward eye contact. He wanted to start a conversation, but nothing came to mind. Thankfully, once again, Sapnap saves him from having to think of one.

"So, where are we studying?" Sapnap asks, now placing his shoes neatly against the rack. Karl turns to look at him, who's now up on his feet.

The space between the door and the stairway was rather short, and Karl found himself oddly close to the boy, at least, close enough to make Karl worry that he was too close.

"Um, upstairs in my room, if that's alright with you," Karl says, nodding his head towards the stairs.

Sapnap leans against the wall to make room for Karl to go up, "Lead the way."

So that's what he did. Karl could feel his palms grow sweaty as he trekked up the stairs. It felt weird to have someone right behind him coming up, especially someone who wasn't A. His mother, or B. George or Niki.

Taking the turn, he opens his door and walks in. Sapnap does the same and takes a few steps forward and waits patiently, admiring Karl's bedroom.

"Feel free to sit wherever you like," Karl pauses, noticing that Sapnap was staring at the few trophies he kept on display (or at least, his mother wanted to keep on display rather hidden in his

closet).

Sapnap ignores the offer and instead drives their attention to the shelf, “Didn’t know you were into robotics,” he chuckles, “why didn’t you say that to begin with?”

Karl could feel his cheeks grow warm, and he came up next to Sapnap.

“It was years ago,” he says, getting up on his tiptoes and blowing the dust off of one of the platings, “See? 2016.”

Sapnap thinks for a second before turning to Karl, “is there anything you can’t do?”

Karl doesn’t hesitate to answer, “Sports,” he glances at the boy beside him, “football.”

The boy hums and takes his backpack off his shoulders. He clicks his tongue and shakes his head.

“I guess I have a one up on you, then,” he says before punching his shoulder lightly. Karl can’t help but roll his eyes and let his shoulders drop from the prior tension.

“Yeah, yeah, now what do you need help with?”

From there, Sapnap had pulled a few unfinished worksheets from his bag and explained his issue. Most of his struggles dealt with math, specifically some calculus he had yet to learn as well as dimensional analysis. After taking a look at some of the problems he had previously done in class, Karl figured this was definitely the case, and began to teach how to read the problems, let alone how to solve them.

Sapnap sat at the desk while Karl hovered next to him, explaining what the problems were asking for. After a few “mhms” and “I got it”’s from the boy, Karl asked him to identify what they were asking of him on question 10.

“It’s asking for the...” Sapnap trails off, re-reading the problem. Karl waited patiently for him to continue his thought.

“The mass, right?” Sapnap looks at Karl, and for a split moment, Karl could feel his body heat radiating off of the boy in his cold room.

Karl purses his lips, “Close, but...” he points to a part of the sentence, “if you’re undergoing combustion for Acetylene gas, and we want to know what will produce 55.0 liters of carbon dioxide,” he circles the number, “and units must match...”

Sapnap thinks for a moment, and Karl could see the lightbulb turn on in his mind.

“Then it’s volume, since liters are volume and not mass.” He says, enlightened.

Karl can’t help but smile, “Exactly, you got it.”

He notices the excitement in the boy’s eyes when he figures it out, almost proud that he came to the right conclusion, even if Karl guided him there. It was moments like these that Karl cherished while tutoring.

Sapnap writes ‘volume’ underneath the problem.

They went on like that for a little more, just identifying each question and what it was asking for. It made Karl’s heart full to see Sapnap begin to answer them correctly, and with such speed too. What used to take him a minute or two to read the problem, now took him seconds to decide what it

wanted. He was understanding it better.

Eventually they moved on to setting up the equation. The same process went as before: Karl explains each step, does one or two for him, then allows Sapnap to try and Karl steps back to answer questions or assist in that problem.

An hour had already passed by when Karl was able to let Sapnap complete the worksheet in full, taking a step back and working on his own homework in the meantime.

Their silence was comfortable, thankfully.

During this time, Karl noticed a lot about the boy. For starters, he couldn't sit still to save his life. He was constantly bouncing his leg or moving from one location to another. The desk was now desolate, and the beanbag in the corner of his room the opposite; occupied by the working boy.

He also noticed that Sapnap had the tendency to hum while he worked. Not obnoxiously or anything, but softly, and of songs that Karl couldn't recognize. They weren't to the tunes of modern day music, at least, none that Karl would know.

Somewhere along the road, Karl stopped working and only paid attention to the boy in the beanbag chair. He didn't do it on purpose, he was just drawn to him - to watching him work. He looked so... pretty in thought. It didn't even cross his mind that he was staring until Sapnap looked up and winked at him.

"Like what you see, Jacobs?" he teases, lowering his legs that served as a flat service for his folder with his work on top of it.

Karl looked away quickly, "Sorry," he cleared his throat, "I guess I zoned out, or something."

Now intrigued, Sapnap sets his pencil down, "What's on your mind?"

*You.*

Karl shakes that thought away, almost shocked that the boy was the first thing to come to mind.

"Nothing," he lied, looking back onto his own work.

"Nothing," Sapnap repeats, not convinced one bit. He stands up and walks towards Karl, taking a seat next to him on his bed, "Whatcha working on?"

Karl tenses at the shift in weight on the bed. Their knees were barely touching, but he could feel it from miles away. He's hesitant in answering, but does so with a shaky breath.

"Reading," he answers, keeping his eyes on the book in hand. He's beginning the next chapter.

Sapnap hums in response and leans closer to Karl, their shoulders brushing against each other, "Tell me about...," he places his hand over Karl's and turns the book over, revealing the cover, "*The Great Gatsby*."

Karl feels like he could set the book on fire from how hot his hands were.

He answers him regardless, "It's about this millionaire named Jay Gatsby and he just wants to be reunited with his lover, Daisy Buchanan. It's told by Gatsby's friend, Nick Carraway."

Sapnap nods, "Tell me more?"

Karl nearly does so, but remembers that he was there to tutor him, not tell stories. He shakes his head.

“You’re supposed to be finishing your work,” he closes the book, “unless you’re just waiting for me to check it.”

Sapnap scrunches his nose, “perhaps you’re right,” he stands up, “say, if I got all these right, you’ll tell me more while I work on the next worksheet?”

Sapnap is standing in front of him now, with a bargain hanging before Karl on a hook.

He hesitates before agreeing, “Fine, *only* if you got *all* them right.”

Karl places his bookmark in his novel and sets it down on his nightstand. Sapnap snatches his paper and hands it to him proudly. It was indeed done.

He takes it gently and sits at his desk. With a pencil in his right hand, he begins to check his work, calculating most of the problems in his head while Sapnap stood behind him, looking over his shoulder to see if he got any wrong.

To Karl’s surprise, Sapnap *had* gotten all of them right. Not even a single unit was missed; it was 100% correct.

He turns to see Sapnap smirking and shrugging his shoulders.

“I guess you have to tell me more now,” he says before grabbing another one of his worksheets and taking a seat on the opposite side of the bed.

So that’s what he did.

While Sapnap worked, Karl began a summary of the book’s plot, including details he wrote on post-it notes found inside the book itself. He was close to finishing it, but wasn’t quite there yet.

He told the story while working on his own homework and while ‘grading’ Sapnap’s papers when he completed the work. The boy only listened, his hums encouraging him to continue. They reassured Karl that he wasn’t in fact boring him with the retelling of the book. For once, Karl was the one talking, and he didn’t feel bad or awkward doing it.

Eventually, he got to the point where he stopped in the book.

“I can see why you hate Tom so much,” he chuckles, “he doesn’t love Daisy.”

“It’s complicated,” Karl begins, choosing his words carefully, “I think he does, just not in the right way.”

The boy responds, “He cheated on her, several times, Karl.”

He can only nod, “Right, but there had to be something there, at least at one point there was.”

Sapnap inhales, “Then is Gatsby’s love for Daisy the right way?”

A moment passes by them. It takes Karl another to respond, “No... I think he’s in love with the idea of her, you know? Like the version of her before he left for the war.”

Sapnap scoots closer to Karl, putting his work down, “Then, is there even a right way?”

His breath hitches, “Maybe. Not here, though.”

They fall silent once again. Karl’s about to move to his desk when Sapnap brings up Nick Carraway.

“Maybe Nick loved Gatsby, but we just don’t know it yet,” he jokes.

Karl nearly disagrees with him, but he’s reviewing over the book in his mind, collecting data that Nick *could* be in love with Gatsby.

With no response, Sapnap retracts his statement, “That’s just from what I’ve heard from you though, I could be wrong.” He stands up and looks at the clock.

“Oh man, it’s already 6:00,” he says, and starts to pick up his papers, “sorry, I wasn’t paying attention to the time.”

Karl snaps out of his thoughts and peers into his clock; he was right, it was *past* six o’clock. Oh how the time flew by so quickly.

“No, no, don’t worry about it,” Karl helps him, “I’ll uh, walk you to the door.”

Once Sapnap had gathered all of his things, he was out the door and traveling down the stairs. Karl followed behind, and wondered why he was leaving so abruptly. Perhaps he was missing dinner, or he had other plans made after this session. Karl could only wonder.

Sapnap’s tying his shoes in the living room when the door opens, and Karl’s mother is walking in with her bag and scrubs still on from her shift. Her eyes go from Karl to Sapnap and back. He had told his mother he was tutoring today, but he never formally introduced the two (mostly because they had never met to begin with).

Karl’s mother looks at the new boy, “Hi, I’m Karl’s mother, and you must be...”

Sapnap quickly gets up from the floor and wipes his hands off his jeans before extending it out, “Nicholas, but please, uh, call me Sapnap. I’m one of Karl’s friends.”

Karl’s eyebrows furrow. He had never known Sapnap’s real name till now.

His mother smiles at him and shakes his hand, “Well, Sapnap, stay for dinner, will you? We’re having baked gnocchi tonight.” she offers.

The boy returns the smile, “Thank you but I’ve really got to get going, maybe next time.” he kindly declines.

She only nods, “Ah yes, well it was nice to meet you, Sapnap. I’ll see you soon, I assume?”

He glances at Karl, who’s currently deep in thought, and agrees, “Yes ma’am, for sure,” he grabs his bag, “thank you for having me.”

Karl blinks, “Of course! Same time Saturday?” He walks Sapnap to the door. His mother has already set forth to the kitchen to begin cooking dinner.

The boy nods, “Same time Saturday. I’ll see you later, Karl.”

From there, he slips out the door and jogs to his car. Karl waits until he’s in his car until he closes the door. Sighing, he presses his back against the door and closes his eyes for a mere second.

This wasn't just about tutoring, and he knows it.

Before he could go further into thought, he hears his mom call for him from the kitchen. She's asking him to fill up a pot for the pasta while she prepares the sauce for tonight's dinner.

He does so, as any mother's son should do, but can't help but ponder over the boy's real name. It's fascinating how he's never thought beyond the nickname, Sapnap, for how odd it truly is.

Karl bets that it's because he's accepted *Dream* and *Punz* as names, and thus 'Sapnap' isn't as weird as it could be. Besides, nearly all players on that team went by quirky nicknames.

It's a pretty name though, Nicholas. He mouths it while facing the stove away from his mother.

Nicholas.

He mouths it one more time, this time slower.

Nich-o-las.

He pauses.

Nic.

*Nick.*

## Chapter End Notes

This one was so much fun to write! I'm excited to see this all play out within the next few chapters.

Spring break has FINALLY arrived! Definitely will have the time to push out at least 1-2 chapters within the next week, so keep an eye out for that. Thank you for all of your support, without you guys, this piece would've probably sat in the corner of my mind rather than on a page - so really, thank you.

As always, feel free to drop a kudos or a comment, and I will see you all in the next chapter! :)

# Uncharted Territory

## Chapter Notes

TW // None

This piece was inspired by reidingrainbow's "Not in Love". Please show her own work some love - as this piece would not exist if it weren't for her's!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*Nick.*

Karl thinks that this parallel is what causes him to finally gather up the courage to tell his two closest friends how he's been feeling for the past week.

He knows that it very well could be a coincidence, that Sapnap mentioned Nick loving Gatsby all while Sapnap's *real* name was Nicholas. However, no matter if Sapnap alluded to his potential feelings or not, there were butterflies fluttering in Karl's stomach and flowers blooming so dangerously in his lungs that if he were to do as much as breathe he could suffocate.

In a good way, that is.

Nonetheless, he figures that he could no longer keep all these... feelings from Niki and George. It felt wrong to do so, in fact, it felt like he'd been lying to them; and that's the last thing he wants to do.

The next day, he makes plans to have the three of them meet up in Karl's bedroom straight after school. He doesn't want to worry them, but he notes that it is of utmost importance. Although short notice, George and Niki comply, seeing as it *must* be important if *Karl* is calling such a meeting.

Throughout the rest of that day, he's overcome with nervousness. He was anxious to tell them about everything- and he meant *everything*. From their impromptu dinner, to the newly gifted sweater, and to their recent, and first, tutoring session, Karl was going to give them the whole spiel. This way, he wouldn't be withholding anything anymore, as well as getting a full and honest opinion on how he should go about this.

It didn't stop him though from being so anxious about it, no matter how much he yearned to tell them it all.

So, this is what brings Karl Jacobs to this very moment, in front of his two closest peers, with a dry mouth and constricted throat.

With a shaky inhale, and a reminder that they were indeed his friends, his exhale brings a recollection of *everything*.

At first, he's jittery. Karl's knees are bouncing, and his fingers are visualizing his words as he runs through the encounters between him and Sapnap. He doesn't make eye contact with the other two, only staring at the ground and peeking up every now and then to assure himself that they were indeed still there; that this was all real.

Unlike George, who constantly gave the other two status updates, but also unlike Niki, who kept so many things to herself, one would believe her to lead a secret life; Karl was reluctant in sharing how he felt. Oftentimes, he felt odd to verbalize his emotions, let alone deal with them himself. As seen many times before, Karl had a terrible tendency to keep everything bottled up inside without even knowing it at times. He was just like that.

So this was difficult for him, to tell them everything, even if they were his closest friends. Hell, not even his mother knows, but that would just be a result of their schedules never aligning closely enough to have a proper discussion with her without it being too late in the night or making her late for work in the day.

He's had to tell her too, not because he felt obligated to (maybe just a bit, since his friends knew before his own mother did), but because she gave the best advice. Most mothers had phenomenal advice anyways, but Mrs. Jacobs had the best of all, then again, Karl Jacobs was biased.

He's skimming over the dinner when he gains more and more confidence. Karl's more passionate about retelling the dinner especially since that was when he learned more about the boy than ever. His friends were fully invested now if they weren't before.

"*And he plays the violin?*" Niki asked, her chin rests in her hands.

Karl nodded with wide eyes, "*and he plays the violin*", he repeated.

When he gets to the topic of the sweater, Karl feels like his voice is booming throughout his room. Something about that whole event made Karl so worked up, not in anger per say, but all the pent up frustration of trying to figure out what it all means.

He even gets up to show them the sweater, reminding George and revealing to Niki its existence. Karl hands it to them too as if it were a show and tell.

"Have you slept in it yet, Jacobs," George teases, feeling its sleeves.

Karl can't help but look away and scrunch his nose, "Shut up," he mumbles in embarrassment. He makes it clear that he hadn't afterwards.

Eventually, he gets into their encounter this past Monday, which sparked the whole tutoring thing. Karl expresses the confusion surrounding Sapnap and lunch, and George only confirms that Sapnap indeed has lunch that period according to Dream. It only confuses the boy more.

Nonetheless, he's flying through their past study session, although he's hesitant on reporting on the Carraway parallel, Karl does so anyways, as outlandish as it may seem.

"It's funny you mention that, actually," George strokes his chin, "Dream calls him Nick, you know."

Niki scrunches her nose, "Sapnap just fits him though," she stands up, "besides, I'd like to keep the name for myself, with the 'i', of course."

Karl giggles. It never occurred to him that his best friend and, well, other friend, would share similar names.

This marks the end of the entire telling of their history. The room had gone quiet with Niki's comment, not because it was deafening or anything of the sort, but perhaps it was that the two were still soaking in the new information.

Karl's fidgeting with his hands, awaiting for a final comment. He felt more resigned, less confident than he was before. The adrenaline rush was quickly declining, bringing Karl back to his usual timid state.

George is the first one to speak further on the matter.

"We can tell that there is *something* there," he looks at Niki to continue.

Niki does so, "I think, and correct me if I'm wrong, as much as he, you know, *teases* you, you're not necessarily *opposed* to it."

Karl clears his throat, "I guess? I don't know, it might just be friendly banter."

A snort could be heard from George in Karl's desk chair. He spins around and chuckles, "oh he's most *definitely* flirting with you, babes."

With that comment, Karl purses his lips and looks away, embarrassed that he said that. Niki whacks the spinning boy in the chair on the shoulder, receiving a yelp and glare.

"You're gonna scare the poor boy," she scolds, then looks at Karl.

"We're not sure he's flirting, per say, but *if* he were" she takes a seat next to him on the floor and leans against the bed, "how would you feel about it?"

Karl takes a moment to think. He's thought about the teasing quite a few times, as anything the boy says racks his mind every time they speak, but he's never really considered it *flirting*. The word alone sends shivers down his spine; it was one that made him nervous and too self conscious to act upon if he dared to.

"I think," his throat feels dry, "I'm fine... with it?" He cringes at the words coming out of his mouth.

Niki only nods, showing some understanding to what Karl was saying.

George decides to take a different approach, "To my knowledge, a guy doesn't give you his sweater, eat dinner and pay for it and *insinuates* there's another, or is as touchy as he is if he wasn't in the slightest flirting with you. If anything," he leans forward, "you should toss a fruity comment back and see how he reacts."

Karl feels his face get hot. He knew George tended to be confident in what he does and what he says, but he still manages to shock Karl every day, some way or another. However, perhaps he's right, yet, Karl doesn't have enough courage or as nearly as much confidence in his flirting abilities to do so (if he has any to begin with).

Niki shakes her head and smiles, "You *could* go that route, but the question is, do *you* like him, Karl?"

He wants to answer her with a firm, solid response; one that he knows and one that he's confident in saying. The truth is, though, as anyone could guess from the week's worth of pondering how he felt about, well, everything, Karl doesn't know.

What he does know is that nobody has made him feel the way Sapnap has made him feel. Each touch sends flames down his body, and scorching marks in place of their contact. He knows that the boy is changing him in ways that he's never considered there could be a chance to change.

He makes plans on somewhat of a whim now and is less focused on his work. Karl lets the thought of the boy consume him at night and he feels gravitated towards him.

It's not much to the normal eye, in fact, this could be defined as a normal, typical crush, but to Karl? This was an uncharted territory he was crossing. It was diving head first into a cloudy, deep, ocean with no life vest or floaties or any way back to the boat.

It was scary.

Even being exposed to a world beyond 'straight', with George, who was a proud homosexual at birth, and Niki, who recently found out she had a liking to both women and men, Karl still hasn't found who he was. There was no label, no sense of direction of what his liking was or even he had one to begin with.

Niki and George have expressed before that he doesn't *have* to know yet. Besides, he doesn't even know if Sapnap swung *that* way, but everyone figures it out at their own pace, right?

Either way, to Karl, having a crush in and of itself was foreign and confusing.

"Karl?"

"I think you broke him."

"Hush, George- Karl?" Niki waves a hand in front of his face, snapping him out of his thoughts, "you there?"

Karl scrunches his nose and blinks. He didn't realize he had been on airplane mode.

"Yeah, yeah," he runs a hand through his hair, "sorry, just was thinking."

Niki nods with a soft smile. She waits patiently, not wanting to overstep.

"I don't know if I like him but," he starts shakily, "but, I wouldn't be *opposed* in liking him."

With that George shoots out of his chair, "As a proud member of the Karl Jacobs fan club," he motions for Karl's hands and pulls him up when he gives it to him, "and your best friend, I hereby declare we set up series of trials for Sapnap to clearly determine whether or not he likes you. Then you can decide to act on it."

Karl can't help but giggle, as his nerves had nearly evaporated due to George's silliness. If there was one thing George was good at, it was bringing a sense of joy and humor to anything that needed it. That and with his british accent, it sells his comment perfectly. Niki gets up onto her feet as well.

"As long as it's okay with *Karl*," Niki reminds him.

"As long as it's okay with *Karl*," George repeats, looking at the boy in question for consent.

Karl sees no harm in clarifying the motives, if he has any or not, of Sapnap. It's only assessing whether or not there's a mutual bond, right? He trusts George, and Niki of course, but he trusts George with a level that allows him to put his faith into not making a fool of Karl.

So he nods.

With a smile on his face, and two arms wrapped around Niki and Karl, he concludes, "Then this is Operation: Karl Gets Bitches," his hands gesture outwards, as though he's revealing an imaginary

sign.

“I think you mean Karl Gets A *Bitch*,” Niki corrects him. Karl exhales out of his nose in laughter.

“Fine, Operation Karl Gets A *Bitch* is now in session,” George leads the two back to their seat on the bed and then takes his own seat at the desk chair.

“And your plan, if any?” Karl asks, leaning against Niki now.

“My plan?” George tilts his head and smirks deviously, “Oh, I’ll tell you *my plan*.”

From there, George spirals into a detective-like manner of different ways (including their tutoring sessions, but not limited to) for means of communication. He covers both the internet social life as well as the physical one.

Karl listens intently and gives his opinions on each part, as Niki reminds George to pause between each idea for Karl’s input. He knows that they wouldn’t do anything, or push anything onto him, that would make him uncomfortable. Karl appreciates their concern and thoughtfulness.

Within the next hour, George has gathered enough information to form a series of these so-called ‘trials’ for Sapnap to take.

There was one regarding the meet up Dream mentioned to George not too long ago; the one about him, Sapnap, and Punz getting together with George, Karl, and Niki. This would allow ample time for Karl to get to know Sapnap in a less formal setting. George figured Dream would still be up for it and would even continue to strongly recommend it.

The next one revolved around going to the upcoming game tomorrow. Sapnap had mentioned Karl coming to another game last week, but there hadn’t been much talk about it since then. Karl figures he could go with George and Niki under the guise of George wanting to see Dream (although, Karl was sure George wanted to spend more time with Dream anyways).

The last was about Saturday’s study session. This was confirmed yesterday that it was still happening, but Karl would make sure to double check with Sapnap that this was still the case. During the session, Karl would bring to light the lunch thing and perhaps even the ‘Nick’ conversation. He’s still deciding on what exactly he would say, but it was a start.

This strongly reminds Karl of the week beforehand, when they about did the same with George and Dream. He felt thankful for having such friends who would be as kind as to help him through all this; not that it was draining, but it was difficult, that was for sure.

Karl comes to the conclusion that he wasn’t alone. He had his best friends on both sides of him, serving as the buoy thrown at him from the sea.

He felt more secure than ever, and now with a weight lifted from his shoulders, he was ready for what the next few days had in store.

## Chapter End Notes

We’re here and we’re ready! We will certainly be getting the content you all came here for in the next few chapters (I know, it took 10 chapters to get here, but trust the process!)

Also, happy birthday to badboyhalo, our beloved.

As always, thank you so much for the support. Feel free to drop a comment or a kudos, and I will see you all in the next chapter! :)

# Advancement

## Chapter Notes

TW // None

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

On the schedule was the football game. After school concluded on that Friday, he quickly went home and did all the work he planned on doing in those two days trailing after it. He doesn't want to have to worry about it over the weekend, in case something came up.

It wasn't much to complete, really, so it isn't long before he's picking out something to wear tonight. He had gone to school in a button up and khakis, which wasn't really football game attire.

He doesn't take as much time as he did last time, in fact, he already had an idea of what to wear.

Karl had decided on wearing the sweater and a pair of jeans. It was risky, yes, but it *would* be cold and Sapnap *did* say it was Karl's now. In the back of his mind, he wants Sapnap to notice it, but he would never admit that to himself, no way, no how.

Slipping on the garments, he receives a text from Niki, signaling that she was parked outside his house. He snatches his keys and cellphone, as well as his wallet, before racing down the stairs. His mom was already at work and her shift would go into the night, but he still texts her that he was leaving now.

When he had told her that he was going to the football game tonight, he knew it raised suspicion in her. Yet, she decided not to pry. That was one thing Karl loved about his mother; she would always wait for *him* to tell *her* about stuff that he wanted to reveal. He still planned on telling her everything, but he'd have to pick a good day. One that she wasn't working, perhaps.

When he arrives in the car, both Niki and George automatically notice the sweater. Nothing had changed about it, for it was still so long that it nearly consumed him, but it was as cozy and comforting as it looked. He had to wash it beforehand, so it no longer smelt of lavender, but instead his own laundry detergent. Yet, it didn't take away its heavy meaning.

They note it, and then review over the rules of the game in case Karl had forgotten. He indeed had and needed such a reminder.

Finding a seat in the bleachers, they had arrived just in time for the game to start. This one had been less crowded. Perhaps it were because they were fighting a 'weaker team,' as George called it.

The game went smoothly, at least, for their team. The other had scored quite little and barely made ground against Karl's team's defense. When they were on offense, Sapnap and Punz gained so many yards, resulting in finishing touchdowns by their quarterback, Dream.

Karl spent quite a bit time tracking down #17, he found it easier though when they took off their helmets. This game, he had worn a bandana to keep his hair back. He was just as sweaty as he was the last time around, if not more, Karl could gather as half time swung around.

He appreciated the band and color guard more than ever in terms of the display of art on the field. They were truly the ones to make the game what it is, but Karl was biased in still not knowing how the game properly worked and was an arts kid at heart.

The second half flew by, with their team sweeping up the competition, gaining another 28 points to the board. The crowd was still lively, even though being smaller than the last, and George was still as excited as he was last time, cheering on Dream like a lunatic in the stands.

Niki was enjoying herself as well, which made Karl feel less guilty for dragging her out here with them. That's what friends were there for, though, and Karl couldn't be any more grateful to have her.

When the moments after the last second lingered, and the last cheers from the crowd faded, George pulled both Niki and Karl through the wave of people in the stands. Dream was against the fence, scanning the crowd until landing on George, who was oh so eager to slip through the gate and hug him.

“I’m sweaty,” Dream warned, but George had no care in the world and only hugged him tighter. Dream’s arms wrapped around him and picked him up off his feet, receiving a yelp and a frantic ‘put me down!’ from George. Niki and Karl giggled at the sight.

When they let go of their embrace, Dream turned to the other two. “It’s good to see you guys again, how was it?”

Karl nods, giving him a thumbs up. Niki punched his shoulder, “look at you Mr. Quarterback, scoring half of that board,” she praised, earning a laugh from Dream.

“It’s all thanks to Sapnap and Punz, really,” he says humbly before looking behind the two, “speaking of the devil.”

Karl turned to see Sapnap coming towards them. He still wore his bandana, keeping his dripping hair from sticking to his face. His helmet was in one hand, the other waving at them as he jogged to the group.

Karl was reminded of how much bigger he was in comparison to his own frame.

“Y’all enjoy the game?” He asked, scanning the group before him. His eyes fall on Karl, and upon making eye contact, Karl looks away. He curses himself for being so awkward.

George was still at Dream’s hip, “always,” he says.

Dream rolls his eyes, “you’re biased, you know,” he says teasingly before ruffling his hair. George only pouts.

In the crowd, they can hear someone shout out Niki’s name. Niki, herself, turns to see one of her friends from her Psychology class. She politely excuses herself before going off to her. Karl recognizes her to be Hannah Rose.

As if on cue, George pulls Dream away towards something down the field. Dream was as equally confused as Karl was, but went along with it, now leaving Sapnap and Karl alone, well, as much as they could be alone in such a public setting.

“Was this game just cool again or...” Sapnap asks teasingly, making Karl laugh.

“Shut up,” he says embarrassed, “you did great,” Sapnap has a smile tugging at his lips now.

“I was hoping so, it’s all skill, you know.”

Karl definitely recognizes the references he was making from last week’s game. Playing along, “I don’t know...” he sucks a breath in through his teeth, “I do still think there’s luck involved.”

Sapnap only shakes his head and chuckles, “How many games is it going to take for you to be convinced otherwise,” he asks.

Karl pauses for dramatic effect and thinks for a solid moment. Coming to a decision, he concludes, “however many it takes, I guess.”

With a chuckle, Sapnap gestures for him to walk down the field with him. Karl follows at his side, and Sapnap continues the conversation.

“Fine, you win this time,” Sapnap says in defeat. Karl lets out a sign of victory before laughing alongside Sapnap.

They’re walking towards the locker rooms now, trailing behind George and Dream and other players.

“I was- I was meaning to text you earlier about it, but Dream told me you were coming with George tonight,” he confessed.

Karl looks up at him, confused and a bit off edge from his change in tone.

Sapnap recognizes the shift in the tension, “It’s not anything bad or anything,” he reassures, “just, I made a B on the quiz today, so... thank you.”

There’s a wild grin appearing on Karl’s face. No matter who it was, Karl had a special heart for those improving in their studies.

“That’s amazing, Sapnap!” he congratulated, his hands moving in excitement. He wasn’t expecting such improvement so quickly, especially only after one study session.

Sapnap exhales, “I mean, it’s all thanks to you of course.”

Karl shakes his head profusely, “it’s all *you*,” he pokes his shoulder, “*you’re* the one who took the quiz.”

Smiling, Sapnap thinks for a second, “I guess... but still, couldn’t have done it without your help.”

Karl can’t help but a tad bit proud of himself. He was just glad to have helped.

“Anytime, and I mean it,” Karl offers.

For a second, they go silent, only the sound of their footsteps in the artificial grass crunching. The crowd had died down behind them, most people going home in the late night. The next day brought the weekend, and many were eager to go home. They were nearing the locker room now, not too far from Dream and George, who stood at the sides of the doors talking.

Sapnap looks down at Karl, “nice sweater by the way, where’d you get it?” he teases.

Karl had forgotten he had been wearing his sweater. In fact, he had forgotten why he wore it to begin with.

Karl rolls his eyes, “You’re too funny, you know that.” He wants to brush it off before he’s too

embarrassed to speak. He's shocked the boy noticed, but it was hard not too. It remained long on him, and still pooled in his lap whenever he sat down.

Shrugging, the boy replies softly, "It looks good on you."

The compliment released butterflies into his stomach. He felt his cheeks grow undeniably red.

"Thank- Thank you," he stutters.

They've now caught up to Dream and George. Dream looks up at their arrival and says something to George before going around him to Sapnap.

"Ready?" Dream asks, looking to Sapnap, and then glancing at Karl.

Sapnap clicks his tongue, "Mhm," he turns to Karl, "I'll see you tomorrow morning, right?"

Karl nods, and from there, the two taller boys go into the locker room, leaving George and Karl to discuss the events of the night whilst walking back down the field.

George allows Karl to run through the conversations of the night, even tackling on the compliment at the end. It still made his chest tighten, suddenly becoming overwhelmed by the words again.

By the time Karl's said everything he could say, they've met up with Niki, who was in the process of waving Hannah goodbye.

"Took you two long enough," she nagged, walking alongside them to the car.

George rolls his eyes, "not my fault Karl has game." They both snicker.

Karl shoves George aside in embarrassment, "oh hush."

They're getting in the car when George recollects his night. He skims over the game and all that, but it's the offer he makes that really makes Karl listen. Not that he wasn't before, but his ears definitely perk up.

"Dream invited us to Punz's party tomorrow," he starts. Niki hums in thought, nodding at what he said whilst looking at the road.

Karl's eyes widened. George had a tendency to sign them up for things before reporting back to the group, and he can only guess that he has written their names down on the VIP list.

"You said sure, didn't you," Karl deadpans.

George twists his body to see Karl in the backseat, "You really think I'm gonna resist a chance to see party Dream? *Of course* I said yes, what kind of question is that?"

Karl audibly groans and sinks into his seat. Niki can't help but laugh at the situation.

"Listen, listen," he looks at Niki and glances at the mirror to see Karl, "Sapnap is going, and I think this would be a perfect time to get to know him."

Karl lets him continue, not giving in just yet.

"C'mon, it'll be fun! Besides, you've never been to one and I thought it's about time you lost your party virginity."

Karl kicks the back of his seat, “You suck, you know that.” Niki giggles in the front seat.

Niki wasn’t against the idea, in fact, she was more of a party girl than any of the three in the car. She used to sneak out with Hannah to attend Minx’s Bashes, but that was before they became friends with George. Since then there hasn’t really been any she was intent on going to, and she spends most of her time with George and Karl anyways; she liked to keep it that way too.

George whistles through his teeth, “I didn’t hear a no,” he sings.

Karl hadn’t said no because he was still contemplating it. George was right, this would be a perfect time to get to know him. He would be able to see the Sapnap away from school and his studies, one that could make or break whatever they’ve got going on. Karl would want to know if he were wasting his time or not, so logically, it would be a good opportunity.

However, part of him didn’t want to know. He likes where he’s at; he doesn’t want to ruin it all. Karl knows that if anything were to go further, not that it would, but *if* it were, he would have to see Sapnap in a new environment. It had to be part of the operation anyways.

Karl noticed that, as much as he kept pushing him to his limits, it was George who was really advancing the way Karl felt about Sapnap. He can’t complain though, because he wasn’t exactly saying no, as George pointed out, yet he wasn’t saying yes.

A moment of silence has passed by the car. The beats of Niki’s “When they hand you the aux cord” playlist shuffling around.

“What time tomorrow?” Karl asks quietly. A shout of glee and victory erupt from the front of the car.

“He said to be there at 8-ish,” he pumps his fist in the air, “Karl Jacobs at a party, let’s go!”

Karl rolls his eyes.

He knows this wasn’t like him. Anyone could’ve told him that, yet he lets it happen. This boy was changing Karl as he knew it, as each moment grows by with new adventures and discoveries. It scares him, yes, but this newfound confidence and excitement skims over any doubts he had.

Is this what it was like to live life on the edge? To do as he pleased without much of a second thought? While he didn’t want to be *too* reckless, he also didn’t want to be *mundane*. He’s lived his whole life around due dates and books, so maybe it’s okay to have more change. A little routine roulette never hurt anyone, right?

By the time Niki pulled up in his driveway, George had supplied him the plan for tomorrow night. Karl would pick them up tomorrow with the address in the GPS. Although there were three of them, the buddy system would still play. Karl was deemed the Designated Driver, which didn’t bother him. Although he knew what a fictional high school party entailed, he hadn’t had a clue if real life ones resembled that of in a book.

They would go over the rest of the rules in the car on the way there. Karl thanks Niki before leaving the car and going off into his house. The lights were off, just the way he left it when he departed.

He made sure to text his mother throughout the game and while in the car to assure her that he was still safe and still on schedule. She was still at the hospital, so he didn’t have to worry about her waiting for him in the living room.

He takes off his shoes and trudges up the stairs. It had been a long day, that was for sure.

Swinging by his bathroom, he's stuck in the same place as he was just a week before: in front of his mirror, admiring the sweater that adorned his skin.

It did look nice on him.

From there, he gets ready for bed. Taking a shower, brushing his teeth, washing his face, etc. It was all done quickly, as yawns were climbing their way out of his throat.

His bed welcomes him with open arms, pulling Karl under the blankets and into the cushions. They felt a lot nicer than the steel risers at the stadium.

Karl wants sleep to consume him before his thoughts do.

Tomorrow would yield a new day. The morning, a quick study session over breakfast before the night, a realm of mystery with the same boy from the sun.

Until tomorrow, Karl notes, before surrendering to the moon.

#### Chapter End Notes

First of all, thank you so much for the 10k reads! That's absolutely insane, guys. I appreciate all of your support, and I hope you're enjoying these chapters.

Let me know how you guys feel. I love interacting with y'all!

As always, I will see you all in the next chapter! :)

# Eclipse

## Chapter Notes

TW // Vomit

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Karl found himself rushing through his Saturday morning breakfast, snatching an apple and downing a water bottle ten minutes before Sapnap arrived.

He had woken up significantly later than he had planned, so much later, in fact, that his mother had already left for work, in which her departure time was 11 AM.

Sapnap, earlier this week, had asked Karl if they could do Saturday morning instead. He agreed, and made the change in his agenda. It wasn't that he had forgotten, but he most certainly slept through all five of his alarms that would've ensured he had woken up in time.

Now he's biting into his apple like a madman while he changes into something a little more presentable. Instead of the Pokemon themed pajama pants his mother bought him a few years prior for Christmas, he opted for his jeans from last night. He kept the same shirt; as it was an old t-shirt he got for participating in an Alzheimer's awareness walk.

He's brushing his teeth when the doorbell rings. Spitting out the foamy toothpaste and kicking his pajama pants into his closet, he hurries down the stairs to the door. Karl opens the door; it was indeed, Sapnap.

"Good morning," he says, entering in.

Karl's trying not to audibly pant from racing from one side of the house to the other, "Good morning to you too."

Sapnap sets his stuff down to take off his shoes.

"If you haven't eaten anything for breakfast, I could whip up some eggs or sausage or whatever," Karl offers, his stomach personally still yearning for more than an apple.

The boy on the floor shakes his head, "No, no, it's okay. I ate earlier."

Karl nods. At least one of them was prepared for this session.

The two of them travel upstairs into Karl's bedroom once again. Karl feels embarrassment traveling up his spine as he realizes that he didn't make his bed or anything. Along with that, a single look in the mirror and one could definitely tell he had just woken up.

His hair was disheveled, tossed about in all sorts of directions and a bit of toothpaste remained on his chin. He wipes the toothpaste off his chin quickly. He must've missed that in his rush to prepare for the study session.

"I'm guessing you just woke up," Sapnap chuckles, taking note of Karl's semi-panicked state.

Karl leans against the wall, “Psh, of course not,” he lies. Was it really *that* obvious?

The brunette sets his bag on the floor and looks at him, “Mhm, I buy it.”

With a wave of his hands, they begin to work once again. The same process as before, Karl would explain, do, and then guide Sapnap through a few problems. Once he had a hold of those, he’d let him work on his own, and they’d talk about school most.

Karl figures now it’d be the best time to ask him the question that’s eaten him up for the past few days.

“Tell me if I’m prying, but,” he starts, gaining the boy’s attention. He hums for him to continue. “Where do you go for lunch? You didn’t come in with me earlier this week.”

He hoped that he wasn’t overstepping any boundaries, but to be fair, it wasn’t too much of a personal question.

Sapnap answers him, “Ah, I just go to Chem and eat lunch with Alyssa. Dream and Punz have first lunch, and besides, sometimes she gives me a headstart on the assignment for the day,” he shrugs.

Karl’s mouth forms into an ‘oh’ like shape. It made more sense now, but he didn’t have a clue that he was spending his lunch with his next period teacher; who was their Chemistry teacher.

“Well, if you ever get bored in Chem, there’s always an extra seat in our booth,” he offers, referring to his three manned window seat.

Sapnap smiles at him, “Thank you, I’ll swing around some time.”

He returns the gesture and goes back to doing his work. He had completed most of it already, only studying now for his upcoming midterm. A few moments pass by before anyone says anything.

“Dream told me y’all were coming to Punz’s party tonight,” Sapnap says, glancing up at Karl.

He sighs, then nods, “Yep. Are you?”

Sapnap replies similarly, “Yeah. He’s a good friend of mine. Throws a hell of a party though, I’ll tell you that.”

Karl giggles, “George figured we’d go. Niki has a few friends coming and George is going with Dream.”

They’re not working as much anymore, now drifting their attention towards the topic at hand.

“Are you going with anyone?” Sapnap asks, twiddling his pencil between his two fingers.

Karl shakes his head almost shamefully, “Yes and no. I guess I’m going with Niki?” he sways his head to both sides, contemplating his options, “or I’ll just find a quiet corner to sit in until they’re ready to leave.”

The boy in the bean bag chair clicks his tongue, “Well, if you ever get bored in the corner, feel free to find me,” he winks at him playfully, “I’ll make it worth your while.”

Karl laughs at the remark. He found it less flirtatious than it was comedic, making him feel less tense and awkward about the situation.

“Oh really,” he raises an eyebrow, “you’ll make it worth my while?”

Sapnap nods his head nonchalantly, “I can.”

“How?” Karl asks, now curious as to what Sapnap had in mind.

“Well,” he sits up straighter in his bean bag chair, “the best spot in town is on his property. I could show you.”

Karl raises an eyebrow, “the best spot in town?”

The boy nods, “Mhm, you’d be amazed by what you can see here in La’ Mahnburgh.”

He was curious, to say the least. Karl had lived here all his life, where all roads were familiar and no spot was left unturned; he had seen it all. So, he’s skeptical, but takes the offer.

“Alright, show me tonight.” Karl accepts, twiddling his pencil between his two fingers now.

“Sounds like a plan. When are you guys swinging around?” he asks. Karl checks his phone to ensure he got the time right before telling him.

“About eight-ish.” he answers.

Sapnap nods, “Great, we’ll come around the same time,” he picks up his work again, “I’m gonna blow you away, Karl Jacobs.”

He can only roll his eyes and do the same, letting out a ‘yeah, yeah, yeah’ before going through his midterm study guide once more.

Their study session ends about two hours later. Sapnap had fairly grasped the topic at hand, which still revolved around stoichiometry, and had left with that dashing smile of his and a wink in assuring they’d see each other at eight.

Karl had better hopes about the party now, especially since he was definitely going to spend more time with Sapnap. He was eager to see what he had in store for Karl, the spot he was talking about earlier.

Only having eaten an apple, Karl whips up some well-deserved french toast for himself. His mother would be returning from work soon, having only a few hours worth of a shift in comparison to the overnight she just took.

He assumes that she would be too tired to cook, so he makes sure to cook up a small pot of pasta for the two of them while he munches on his french toast. It won’t ruin his appetite, instead it’ll deter him from eating the pasta as he went along.

Karl also makes sure to text Niki and George the news. They reacted the way he had though they would, with all caps and scrambled letters to express their excitement. George had even group facetime them to hold a small celebration and meeting for the night.

“Congratulations, Mr. Jacobs, on the accomplishment,” he praises from the phone that sat on top of Karl’s oven timer. Karl does a small bow, thanking him.

While Karl makes his pesto sauce, Niki goes over the rules of the night, having already been to Punz’s house once before with Minx a year ago.

She explained how the house was indeed ginormous, with more square footage than all three of their houses combined. Niki has no idea how he was so rich, but he was, and that’s all she knew on

that.

Picturing the layout, the party she went to last year relatively stayed around the kitchen, dance floor, and pool. Some people would be found on the upper levels, but Punz kept a general rule of not going up there without his permission. Most people respected his wishes.

She recalls how the kitchen harbored all the drinks found at the party, and made a specific point for Karl *not* to touch *anything* there.

“Even the containers with the fruit and candy are spiked with alcohol, so don’t even think about pouring yourself a glass, Karl,” she warns.

Karl had no intentions of drinking anything there anyways. He planned on bringing a water bottle in case he got dehydrated. While he has never been to a proper high school party, he surely did watch movies and read books that *contained* high school parties. If they were anything like the ones he’s read about, then he knew not to drink anything found in a red solo cup.

They went over the buddy system, where George would stay with Dream, Niki would stay with Minx, and Karl would stay with Sapnap. It was simple enough, each of them would have their phones on them to call or text at any given moment. If they didn’t receive one, they were instructed to check their phones anyways at about thirty minute intervals.

While it seemed like overkill, Niki did have a point: the house was huge. They could very easily lose each other, and if someone wanted to go home, Karl would be the one to drive them. Thus, communication was more important than ever.

They’re wrapping up the conversation when Karl’s mother returns from work. He waves his friends goodbye before leaving the call and plating their plates.

“Mmm, that smells good,” his mother marvels, swinging by the counter and kissing Karl’s forehead, “thank you, sweetie.”

They sit down at the table and go over their days. Karl listens to her stories at the hospital, and she listens to how his study session went with Sapnap today.

“This Sapnap kid,” she takes a bite of her pasta, “is he a friend, or...” she trails off.

Karl feels the tips of his ears grow red. He had yet to tell her about how he had met him and all that.

“It’s,” he pauses for a moment, trying to think of the right word, “complicated? I guess.”

She repeats him, “Complicated?”

He wipes his mouth and glances at her, making eye contact.

“I mean, yeah,” he looks away now, “I don’t know yet.”

His mother is quiet, allowing him to speak. She doesn’t want to intrude, so instead, she offers her ear and attention.

She was never one to judge or pressure him into a confession. She would let him tell her whatever he deemed was necessary to tell her; and most of the time, he told her everything anyways.

His mother was as accepting and supportive as a mother could be, having known about George’s

sexuality and fully rooting for him from the stands both publicly and privately behind closed doors.

So Karl tells her bits and pieces of their history; him and Sapnap's, that is. He doesn't bother dragging it out, only telling her the main events. This included the football game, the dinner, and of course, the sweater, which seemed to be the pinnacle and most exciting part of the story.

It's no surprise that when Karl gets to the sweater, she already has a feeling of where this is going.

"I knew that sweater wasn't yours!" she exclaims, "and the way you acted on Wednesday with that boy; oh honey, I think I knew there was something up."

Karl can't help but cover his face in embarrassment, "Mo-om" he groans.

She wipes her mouth, "No, no, no, I knew, I knew," she laughs, "I was waiting for you to say something though."

Karl peeks from his hands and drops them, his shoulders following, being less tense. "Well, thank you."

His mother waves her hands, "Always. Now, off the record," she lowers her voice, "he *is* pretty hot, but you didn't hear that from me."

A shriek erupts from Karl's throat. He *knows* his mother did *not* just call Sapnap *hot*.

They're both laughing over it all, making Karl feel less guilty about waiting so long to tell her. He's thankful for the way she is, seeing as he was so lucky to have such a supportive mother. When their hollering dies down, Karl dives a little deeper into his feelings.

"I'm still, you know, figuring it out though," he uses his fork to move around his pasta on his plate, "I barely really *know* him."

His mother nods, "You've got all the time in the world, honey." She reaches over the table and grabs ahold of his hands, rubbing them with her thumbs soothingly. He only smiles at her.

Karl loves her so much.

They're finishing up their pasta when Karl remembers to tell her about tonight's plans. Now, he had no clue how she'd react now. Karl's never asked to go to a party before, nor has he intentionally stayed after late to do so. He explains to her all the aspects of the plan before allowing her to give him her thoughts.

"As long as you're not drinking, I'm happy," she concludes.

"Make sure you keep an eye on Niki. Teenagers can..." she trails off for a second, "do some terrible things sometimes. So, just, be the boy I taught you to be."

His mother has always had a soft spot for Niki. In fact, she saw herself in his best friend, how bubbly and smart she was. It reminded his mother of her younger years, and she'd hate for anything bad to happen to her.

With Niki's brilliance, though, came her self defense. Niki could 'throw down' if she needed too, having taken self defence classes in the past before. Her father required her to do so before she could attend a party. Thankfully, she's never had to use those skills, but they were always there if she needed it. Niki was probably more better off than Karl and George combined when it came to defending themselves.

Still, though, he promised to make sure that she was safe.

“And, if you do make the stupid decision to drink,” his mother sips her glass, “you call me to pick you up. I don’t care if it’s three in the morning, I’m not gonna let you get on the road intoxicated.”

Karl nods and ensures that he will indeed keep her on speed dial. Other than a few other notes, like reviewing the buddy system and typical first aid stuff, his mother allowed him to go get ready. She opted to do the dishes since Karl made the meal, and much to Karl’s dismay, he lets her while he picks out the outfit for the night.

He ends up settling for something similar to his current attire, only changing for freshness. His jeans were nearly identical to the dirtier ones, and the shirt he wore was an old Hard Rock Cafe shirt he acquired in New Orleans when he and his mother visited the past summer.

It was nearing the point of leaving when he’s reminded to bring water, cash, and of course, his keys. His mother gives him a tight hug and kiss on the forehead before granting him his way out.

Getting into his car, he swings by George’s first and then Niki, both of them fairly close in distance. From there, they were on their way to the party.

Karl immediately notices the amount of cars littered at the side of the road on his way to the house. He figures that there was probably no parking towards the house, so he pulls over into an empty spot. Putting the car in park, the three of them unbuckle their seatbelts and exit the car.

Where Punz lived was far away from any house, in fact, he had his own road leading to his home. The bass from the party could be heard from as far as they were, the house fairly far away but still in distance.

The house was rather large. It must’ve been three or four stories high, and in front of it, a pool greater than the ground plan for Karl’s living room and kitchen combined. Plenty of teenagers were in the pool and around it, the rest about the porch or inside, perhaps most inside.

Dream was where he said he would be, and next to him, Sapnap, who was on his phone. He nudges Sapnap, to which he looks up and notices the three walking towards him.

George is already gravitating towards Dream, as he immediately makes his way to him, earning a hug in return.

“I just saw you a few hours ago,” Dream chuckles, ruffling George’s hair.

He mumbles into his chest, “I don’t care.”

Niki waves to the two of them upon arriving, “Thanks for meeting us here.”

“No worries,” Sapnap says whilst shaking his head slightly.

They all wave each other goodbye, George already dragging Dream into the house and Niki scouting for Minx. Now left in the front yard, Sapnap and Karl.

Sapnap smirks, “Did you just wake up again?”

It should be no surprise to Karl that he would tease him at least once tonight, but it still catches him off guard, punching him lightly in the shoulder mumbling ‘shut up’. He chuckles in return.

“Before we go, though,” Sapnap gestures Karl to follow him towards the doors of the party,

“George *did* ask me to show you what a high school party is like.”

Karl rolls his eyes, “I thought you were going to take me to the ‘best spot in town’”, he uses his fingers, demonstrating the quoted words.

He looks down at him with a smile, “And I will, but I kind of agree with him.”

Of course he would. George made convincing arguments, or at least, begged enough to annoy one into agreeing.

Sapnap’s got his hand on the door handle now, the only thing separating the two boys from the caged chaos is a few inches of wood, “Ready?”

“Do I have much of a choice?” Karl asks him sarcastically.

The boy’s got a wild smile on that face of his, “Nope,” he responds, popping the ‘p’.

Before he turns the knob, though, he leans down to Karl and, with as quiet a voice as he could have outside such a scene, he said, “We can leave whenever you want. Say the word, and we’re out of here, I promise”

Then, before Karl could thank him, he opens the door, and there, before the two of them, was a realm so far and foreign, Karl’s only heard the tales of.

The strong combination of what Karl believes to be alcohol and something pungent, like a skunk, infiltrates his nose, nearly knocking him over. A few steps in, and he’s already brushing against moving bodies, leaving him little personal space.

It’s... loud, to say the least — and crowded, very crowded. The first room alone contains maybe half of what the student section of the stadium could hold; and that was a lot of people.

He’s tied to Sapnap’s hip, though, and quite literally, at that. Perhaps he was too occupied by overstimulation of all his senses, but at one point during their journey through the sea, a comforting arm had slithered around Karl’s waist protectively; not restricting him, but not leaving him to float away.

It doesn’t last long enough for Karl to fully register it though, for the boy besides him had pulled him into a different room, one that didn’t harbor the city’s entire population.

“Sorry about that,” Sapnap apologizes, “didn’t want to lose you there.”

His arm was no longer at his waist. Karl nods, “You’re fine, this is certainly...”

He looks around. For a party this size, it was roughly clean. Sure, there were a few cups scattered about the room, but it wasn’t as trashed as he thought it’d be. Cross that off the list of all the unrealistic tropes of a high school party.

“A lot, right?” Sapnap finishes for him.

Karl glances at him, “Interesting, it’s interesting.”

He’s about to continue observing the room when Sapnap catches his attention.

“Dance with me.”

Karl looks at him with wide eyes. Had he heard him right?

“What?”

The music was blaring, the beat penetrating the wall from the other side. In this room, the same as the last, only with less bodies, and room to move.

“I said,” he leans to his ear as not to shout over the music, “*dance with me, Karl.*”

Then, without a second thought, his hand is taken by the ambitious, rambunctious boy in front of him, leading Karl to the outskirts of the small crowd that formed in the center of the room.

Karl’s not one for dancing. Not only was he god awful at doing so, but also because he’s got two left feet. He’s got the sense of direction to do it, knowing at least the beat to dance to, but with no moves to prove it.

“I don’t know how!” Karl yelps, helplessly.

Sapnap shakes his head, “Stop thinking, Jacobs. Turn off that pretty brain of yours and just,” he begins to fall into his own groove, “dance.”

He observes Sapnap for a moment, taking in the sight before him. He had absolutely no shame in expressing himself as he waved his arms to the nonsense, bass induced, music surrounding them. How he does it so effortlessly, Karl will never fully understand, but what he did gather was that he clearly had not a care in the world in doing so.

That was one thing Karl admired about Sapnap; his confidence and lack of caution for what others thought of him. He was reckless in all the right ways.

Perhaps it was that sense of adventure and mystery that drew Karl in to begin with.

So, in that moment, between the option of turning away and walking out that door as if he had never stepped in to begin with and otherwise, Karl made the decision to follow him.

He was dancing, alright — and the boy with the bandana couldn’t have been any prouder, much to Karl’s obliviousness.

To correct the previous statement, *they* were dancing. Dancing in such a way that would make the cut in a coming-of-age movie.

Karl was swaying dangerously to the ups and downs of the songs, jumping about to hit each thump in his heart. The other, the same, losing himself in the tune.

The whole time, though, loose smiles were tossed about, and barely audible, horrific, singing from the both of them. Karl doesn’t know if he can even call it singing to begin with; it was more like shouting lyrics nonsensically.

He even saw Niki and Minx, who joined the two in their state. The four of them having the time of their lives, it seemed.

At one point, Karl didn’t register the bodies pushing against him. He was so far into the thrill and joy of dancing that he *should’ve* been bothered, but wasn’t. He was pushing right back against them, if anything. Was this what it was like to simply not care — to just, do?

What he did register, was how he was pulled away so quickly that he could’ve been given whiplash. Sapnap had gripped onto his arm tightly and spun him around towards him. His back was now pressed against the other’s chest protectively.

Before Karl could retaliate, Sapnap pointed out the mess of vomit pooled a few feet away now, and let go of him.

“You were going to slip,” he says.

Karl should be thankful for the save, and he was, but he couldn’t help but laugh.

He laughed.

Hard.

He doesn’t know why it was so funny to him, but he had nearly folded in half, similarly to a lawn chair, in laughter. Sapnap laughs too, not knowing why either, but because Karl had been so delirious.

Giggles erupted from the back of Karl’s throat, but was drowned out by the music. His stomach hurt, but it felt *so good* to laugh. Sapnap the same, and they were laughing together, hysterically so.

Eventually, they’ve calmed down enough to come back to their senses.

“Follow me!” Sapnap leads them away from the scene and to a back door.

Karl was still rather giggly, having nearly slipped and fallen in vomit.

It was much cooler outside. The fresh wind hitting the light coat of sweat on their skin as Sapnap leans against the side of the mansion. Karl nearly does the same, but his legs have gone to jelly, sending him sinking towards the pavilion.

“What’s got you pissing yourself like that?” Sapnap breathes out, equally as confused and amused at the boy on the floor.

Karl sighs and gives this dazed smile to him, “I could’ve slipped and busted my ass on vomit,” his chest heaves in post-laughter, “and for some reason that took me out.”

Sapnap shakes his head and offers his hand, “Come on, Jacobs. Let me show you the spot.”

Karl takes it without a second thought. Pulling him onto his feet, Sapnap lets go, and tingles remain.

They weave through some people in the backyard, then take a turn for the woods. Karl felt a chill travel down his spine. They were getting further away from the society behind them.

Before entering the forest, Karl stops hesitantly.

“Where are you taking me?” He asks nervously. He had come to his senses now, realizing that the boy was about to drag him somewhere with no witness or clue of his location.

Sapnap must’ve recognized the sudden shift as his face softens. “You’ll love it, I promise,” he gives him a soft smile, “trust me, it’s just behind these trees.”

Perhaps he did trust him, or maybe he was too curious for his own good. One thing was for sure, that before they *did* go out into the forest, Karl sent a quick text message to the two others to let them know where he was going. He waited until one of them had replied.

There’s a small, man made path laid out. To the naked eye, you couldn’t recognize it as one unless you knew something was at the end of it.

They follow the small trail for not too long, in fact, Karl believes himself to have overreacted earlier, as the second they were on it, they were out. At the other end, Sapnap hadn't lied.

Karl doesn't think he's seen a prettier sight in his life.

He had seen plenty of documentaries highlighting the beauties of the world, but he thinks this was as close as he was going to get to the fairy pools in Scotland or the Machu Picchu of Peru.

In the clearing had sat a single bench, and before it, a sight overlooking the entire town. The soft glow of street lamps illuminated the roads he had driven on a hundred times before. Familiar turns took him to his own house, just in the corner of his sight. Further down, the presence of hundreds of more just like his own, with people just like him, living their lives on a day-to-day basis.

Places he knew and loved, like the public library and Eret's Cafe were more evident and revealing than ever under moon. It was a new perspective on the town he grew up in.

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

Karl could only nod, with no ability to tear himself away from the sight. It *was* beautiful.

"I remember when Punz and I first discovered it. We were playing in the woods, being kids and all that," he takes a seat on the bench.

"We went far enough to reach the end of the world, we thought," he continues, reminiscing.

Karl sits alongside him, "If I didn't know any better, I'd think I'd reached the end of the world too," he admits.

"I don't think I've seen anything more breathtaking than this," Karl marvels.

They sit in silence for a moment. The music faintly played behind them, just barely scratching the forest walls of the clearing. It was serene and innocent.

It was enchanting and ethereal, and- just about any word that Karl's vocabulary contained for synonyms for the word 'beautiful' was what the sight was.

Nothing short of it.

"Why'd you take me here?" Karl asks, his head turned to the other.

He's still looking out at the town, "You were the only person I thought would appreciate it as much as I do."

For once in his life, Karl didn't bother analyzing what Sapnap said. No investigation, no hidden meanings; Karl let it soak without a second thought.

Karl's studying his face, instead, now. Sapnap's eyes captured the reflection of the new realm, and his cheeks engulfed its presence. He was staring off intently, keeping his gaze locked in one spot out there on the town. His lips were slightly parted, dried and cracked, revealing where his priorities lied.

What was once taking up Karl's attention was no longer as captivating as the boy next to him.

He wants to say that in that moment, he finally understood what spontaneity called for. There was so much more to it, as he would soon discover, but right then and there, as they sat before new horizons, in the late October night sky, just shy of the spirit of adventure behind them, Karl

accepted what was to come, and what had passed. For as much was understood, he barely relished in, and acted on such dangerous impulse.

Because when Sapnap finally turned his head towards Karl and their eyes met, an eclipse occurred.

It was quick, where as soon as it was there, it vanished, and yet felt as though it lingered longer. For a split second, all was still, and all secrets dormant within Karl awoke.

Should Apollo and Selene coexist peacefully again, Karl would beg for it to have the same effect as it did the first.

For when they pulled away, it was yearned for again immediately.

And such must be limited.

## Chapter End Notes

Was it worth the wait?

Thank you guys for all the support and sticking through and through with this work. This chapter was long in the making, and I'm just glad to have finally published it. Don't worry, this is certainly not the last chapter; there are plenty more, I assure.

I've been noticing more Karl, Niki, and George friendship combos lately, which makes my heart full! The three of them have such a lovely dynamic, and I'm happy to see others realize that as well.

As always, though, feel free to leave kudos or comments, and I will see you all in the next chapter!

# Confession

## Chapter Notes

TW // Panic, anxiety

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

One could say that Karl Jacobs was found flustered, his body glitching as though it had malfunctioned under such circumstances. His skin became a flame to the touch, and beneath it, a boiling desire, something so strong, that it no longer felt like himself. It was foreign, almost infectious.

He had no clue what to make out of it.

His hands had reached towards the boy in the moment, but had fallen back into his lap as the other beat him to it. His rough hands were brought up to Karl's jaw, cupping his face. The palms, it were the palms that spread such heat down his body. They had carried him so gently, though, as if Karl's cheeks were made of glass.

His body had melted so easily under his touch, which was no surprise given every other time they had merely brushed against each other, invisible marks were left imprinted into Karl's body. The effect was ever so dangerous, yet addicting.

When they had pulled away, Karl's eyes fluttered open, meeting the same ones as before. Neither one of them looked away, just staring at each other, perhaps recollecting what just happened.

At least, that's what Karl *should've* been doing, but wasn't.

He was only staring at him, observing the features of his face; the light freckles dancing on his cheeks, his hazel eyes with such dilated pupils, and the shadow from the glow of the town beside him.

Everything about it, him, the moment, was so utterly capturing and drawing, that Karl didn't render the kiss till he felt the wind tickle his neck. That was when it all clicked; that he had done something so far from who he was.

He had really kissed Sapnap, the boy that had been circling his mind for weeks now. The same boy who constantly reminded Karl of his existence with a sweater that had only been worn twice now. It was the same boy that never left, and was constantly around, whether it be in his head, or through touch; he was always there.

Sapnap had slithered into his consciousness and had remained since that first time in that hallway, when Karl had been more drawn to him than the boy George just so happened to be snapping at the time.

Through the first game, to the dinner, to the study sessions, to now, Sapnap has been on his mind, and no matter how many times Karl tried to deny or convince himself otherwise, it was true. It was so utterly true and raw; nothing artificial to it.

Karl wonders if only he had accepted it sooner that it would have led him to this moment in time.

“I like you.”

Karl snaps back into reality, realizing that he has been peering into Sapnap for quite some time now.

“What?” He asks, not sure if he had heard him right.

Sapnap visibly swallows, his Adam's apple bobbing, “I like you,” he repeats.

“Like, a lot, Karl.”

He doesn't know how to respond. There's all the words he's been subconsciously wanting to say at the tip of his tongue, yet the barrier of his teeth hold him back. Part of him *wants* to say it back, to put forth himself as Sapnap did.

What stops him, though, is how *terrifying* doing so would be.

Yes, Karl has done some things he would have never, ever, thought he would do in his lifetime in one day. He's gone to a proper high school party, has danced like a madman without a care in the world, and has even had his first kiss. So one would think he'd might as well expose himself even further, but he doesn't.

It frightens him on an emotional level. It's being vulnerable intentionally in a way that no one has ever seen before. It's putting himself on the front lines, exposed.

He opens his mouth to say something, but nothing comes out. It's as though he were paralyzed.

“You don't have to say anything in uh, return, or anything,” Sapnap blurts, noticing the tension in the air.

He rubs the back of his neck, “I... wanted you to know, I guess.”

With that, the boy stands up, feeling his pants for his phone. His hands are shaking, and his breath likewise. Karl feels dread pool in his stomach.

He wants to let Sapnap know he feels the same, that he too has liked him- that it has taken up to this point to realize that it was more than just a friendship-like attraction.

It makes him feel awful knowing that Sapnap has no clue that they were in the same boat; the same ocean, even. He doesn't want him to think he's stranded out there alone, with no safety net or buoy.

So, with all his strength and courage, he swims out there.

He goes to the point of no return.

“I...” his voice cracks embarrassingly, making him wince and cringe at the delivery, “like you too.”

It feels like they're back in middle school, confessing secrets at the playground only to hug after the final bell rings in private. Except, it's high school and Karl's never experienced a silly middle school relationship in all seventeen years of his life. All he's ever known was what the other kids told him and the books he's read.

Sapnap gives him a warm smile. It's sympathetic, almost, and forced. Karl immediately notices the difference.

“Karl, really, it’s fine,” it fades for a second, “don’t say things you don’t mean.”

He blinks, not once, not twice, but several times in shock.

Karl *had* meant it, and had meant it so profusely, that it nearly knocks him out cold. He wanted to cower away behind his closed bedroom doors, having exposed himself and everything dormant within him, and Sapnap hadn’t believed him. Not the slightest bit, either.

Karl gets up, now a little more frustrated and misunderstood. He’s telling the truth.

“I’m serious, Sapnap,” he starts off strongly, “I- I like you too, I just...”

Sapnap furrows his brows, “just what?”

He closes his eyes, and musters enough strength to finish his sentence.

“I’m just scared, okay?” it comes out shaky, like reading the final pages of a book where the conflict has not yet been resolved, anticipation and anxiety coursing through his veins.

“I’ve never... I’ve never kissed anybody- or felt like *this*, for that matter of fact,” Karl admits, leaving his vulnerability out there on a platter.

“I don’t know what to do, or what to say, or how to say it- to you, to me, to anyone.”

“I just know that I like you, too, alright?” he admits once again, this time more firm than ever.

They were both standing across from each other, a feet or two away from the bench they were once sat on. Karl’s chest feels tight, and with each breath he drew, it only got more tense and constricted.

“Please believe me when I say it,” he whispers, voice having gone hoarse.

All he wants now, in his wake, is for Sapnap to understand that he feels the same- that perhaps, he did want more than study sessions and brief walks in the hallways.

He wanted to know who Sapnap was beyond the jersey and worksheets. Karl wanted to know the hidden quirks about him, and anything that wasn’t on the front page of his life.

“I believe you.”

Karl looks up, his vision blurry from the intensity of the moment.

“You do?”

Sapnap nods, he was quieter, more genuine and soft.

“I do.”

With that, and Karl doesn’t know who had made the first move, arms were wrapped around his chest to his back, drawing him into an embrace that made his shoulders drop and jaw unclench.

It was warm, and not too tight, yet not too loose. It felt just right, and Karl could inhale the cedarwood-like cologne he always wore, along with that slight hint of lilac from his detergent, as noted from the original state of the infamous sweater.

They were simply holding each other, neither one bothering to say anything just yet, only taking in each other’s presence.

Dare Karl say it, he didn't want it to end, so he only holds on tight, or at least as much as he can when the other chuckles at the attempt.

"You're so cute, you know?" Sapnap says quietly, teasing the one underneath him.

Karl shakes his head in embarrassment, "stop," he moans.

"Well if this is going to go any further," they're pulling away slowly now, "you gotta know that I'm going to say things like that."

*To go further.*

Karl had forgotten that this was the catalyst for the next level, and he had no clue where to start. It almost draws him back to a panicked state as earlier, but Sapnap prevents such from happening.

"If you feel comfortable, of course, I don't want to pressure you into anything too quickly," he assures, looking in his eyes.

Karl shakes his head, "I want to, I just... don't know where to go from here."

The other nods in response, having listened to him intently.

"Well, we can take it slow," Sapnap offers, "we don't have to do anything extravagant."

Karl thinks for a moment. It was so incredibly reassuring that Sapnap didn't want to dive into it headfirst, but instead was willing to go at Karl's pace, even if it was god-awfully slow and painful. Of course, Sapnap would never say such a thing, whether it were true or not, but it was nice to know it.

"I like that," Karl agrees, "nothing fast."

He hums and smiles. Nothing fast seemed so foreign in a day full excitement and new territory.

"We could go on a date. A proper one- one that isn't spying on our best friends," he offers light-heartedly, gaining a giggle from Karl.

"You like that? We can go anywhere you'd like."

He looked angelic, almost, with the town behind him. Even in the dark, Karl could see how kind and welcoming the boy was.

To be honest, he didn't know where he'd want to go. Karl was the type to curl up on the couch at home, to watch a movie whilst sipping hot cocoa, or something of that simple nature.

Was that date material? Or was it too domestic to be a 'first date' type of ordeal?

"But, you don't have to know now, we have time," Sapnap notes, feeling the hesitation from Karl.

'We have time.'

It reminds him of his mom.

It's sweet, and cautious, like the conversation he had prior to the party with his mother. If there were anything pointing towards Sapnap being all that Karl thought he was, it was this.

Karl thinks for a moment, "I'll let you know," he clears his throat, "but I want to, I really want to"

he breathes.

From there, they only agreed and decided that it was getting late, and with no word from either of their friends, they set out on a journey to discover where they had gone to.

Karl feels a little giddy on the inside. There was so much to tell, and he would have to explain the whole situation to Niki and George; perhaps when they weren't either drunk from partying or just too exhausted to think straight.

Eventually, the two had found their friends on the dance floor, surprisingly all together in the same general area. They had met up sometime that night, and decided to keep close to one another.

Dream and George were so close that they were nearly touching- in fact, they probably were, but Karl doesn't want to think about that at the moment. Niki and Minx were just singing along the music, their voices so incoherent and off pitched that it's comedic.

Wrangling up their friends, Sapnap and Karl parted their ways to enter their cars. Karl promises that he'd let Sapnap know what he was thinking, and the other only responds with to not worry too much about it, and that anything would make him happy; as long as they were together, that is.

Entering his car, and buckling up the other two nimrods in the backseat, he sets off on his journey back home, a slight smile almost permanently etched into his face.

George must've noticed it from the front mirror.

“Why are you so happy,” he slurs, questioning the boy’s hidden excitement.

Karl looks up into the mirror at the boy who was barely awake and the girl who was already long gone into her rest.

“I’ll tell you in the morning.”

With that, Karl drove under Selene’s path, with winding, twisting, familiar roads leading him back to his own sanctuary.

It would be one hell of a story in the morning, but for now, in the night, only Sapnap and Karl knew of what happened between them.

And till the sun rose again, it would remain like that.

## Chapter End Notes

Ahhh! Sorry guys that it took so long, hit a nasty writer's block and with the end of the school year approaching, exams have been keeping me busy.

I hope you guys enjoy this chapter! Took some time playing with how they'd react to the situation, but I think it all worked out in the end.

As always, though, feel free to leave kudos or comments (maybe toss a subscription to get notifications for when this is updated!), and I will see you all in the next chapter!

## Breakfast

### Chapter Notes

TW // None

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

That same night, Karl managed to drag both Niki and George up the stairs without waking up his dear mother next door.

They had complained the whole time, wanting to crash on the couch and even opting for the floor as the next best thing, but Karl refused, forcing them to lay upon the mattress he had blown up before leaving.

Karl planned for them to take a shower in the morning, seeing as soon as the two of them hit the bouncy, air-filled, mattress, they were out cold once again. Karl, however, took a shower, relishing in the hot water, and reminiscing about the night.

He completed his usual nightly routine before slipping into bed himself, quickly succumbing to the grasp of sleep and rest.

The next morning came as it always did, the sun's rays traveling past his window and only his face, endorsing a fuzzy wake from the boy.

It was still rather early, almost eight-ish when Karl had woken up. The other two remained on the mattress, George's body nearly halfway off of it while Niki's legs were resting over his waist. Karl doesn't know how they managed to get into the position they were in, but he pays less attention to it and instead decides to get some water and painkillers for the two. He had read online that it was the proper care for a 'hangover'; that and a trashcan in case they were to puke any time during the night.

Traveling downstairs, he inhales the sweet scent of baked goods. Sundays were usually his mother's days off, and it hits him that she was making breakfast for the four of them this morning.

"Hey love," she says, whipping some heavy cream.

"Good morning," he replies, kissing her cheek before reaching for the medicine cabinet.

She turns with the bowl in her hands. The apron she wore was covered in what looks like dough. While she was a pretty darn good cook, she was a messy one at that, hence the apron.

"How was the party? Did you spend time with Snapmap?" She inquires, leaning against the counter.

Karl giggles, he knows that she didn't just call him 'Snapmap'.

"It's *Sapnap* first of all, and- and yes, I did," Karl proudly says, receiving a smile from his mother.

She sets the bowl down, “Ah, yes, *Sapnap*, my bad. Tell me about it, won’t you?”

Karl’s searching through the cabinet when she asks him to. He smiles to himself. The night had been so magical, and so eventful, that he could hardly believe it wasn’t a dream. He hopes it wasn’t a dream.

“It was... really nice, you know? Like,” he pauses for a moment, snatching the ibuprofen bottle for his friends, “like a night you know you won’t forget.”

She hums in amusement. Karl guesses that she thought that he wouldn’t have enjoyed it as much as he did.

“And what happened on this ‘night you won’t forget’?” She furthers, glancing at the timer on the oven. She had something in there, probably a pastry of sorts.

He sighs dramatically, thinking back to the night as one far but so close. It truly had been so fairy-tale like that he wanted to go back already.

“Well, for starters, we danced. We danced *together*,” he adds, opening the pantry for some water bottles.

“And then he took me out to this spot- and it was, *god*, it was so *beautiful*,” Karl marvels, remembering the overview of the city from Punz’s corner of the woods on the cliff, “you could see everything, mom. Our house, the library, the town; everything.”

His mother listens intently. He was aware that he had never been so passionate about something like this, except for documentaries or newly found recipes. She keeps quiet, having forgotten her current task and only holding her head with her hands on the counter.

“And, well, you wouldn’t believe it but...” he hesitates for a moment, having remembered how it all felt, “he kissed me.”

Her eyes go all wide and her jaw drops. Taking him into a hug, she ruffles his hair.

“My own Karl Lee Jacobs, only son, has finally had his first kiss, hallelujah!” She cries, making Karl blush and turn his head away in shame.

“Mom,” he groans in embarrassment, “stop that, you’re going to wake up the ones upstairs.”

“I know I did not just hear that Karl Lee Jacobs, Ms. Jacob’s only son, has finally had his first kiss.”

From the stairs, the two he had just mentioned, stood, equally in shock and amusement. George had repeated what his mother said, causing Karl to feel even hotter; the attention now on him. They rush down the stairs.

“Hallelujah!” Niki replies, meeting the two of them down at the kitchen counter.

How he didn’t notice them from the stairs, he has no idea, but at that time, his two best friends, and his glorious mother, were down in the kitchen, at eight AM, celebrating Karl’s first kiss as they did with George’s.

Plenty of hugs and cheers later, they’ve managed to grasp a hold onto the earth again.

“How much of that did you hear?” he asks, curious to see how long they stood on those stairs

silently.

Niki answers without a second thought, "Just about all of it."

The oven timer goes off, signaling that whatever had been in the oven was ready for consumption. Upon opening the machine, Karl peeks at the contents and moans at the sight; it had been cherry filled pastries, his favorite.

The four of them sit at his round table, each taking a pastry as well as some other breakfast foods his mother made that morning. She made a lot for what they usually had.

They talk about the party, discussing each of their adventures of the night. Niki mentions how she and Minx practically just danced the entire time and sang about; every now and then going off into the kitchen for a quick bite. George practically did the same, only with Dream.

After breakfast, Niki and George decided that they ought to get back home, having not returned that night. They said thank you, as always, and gathered up their belongings before setting off for their own homes with their own parents.

Karl spends the rest of his day with his mother, helping her with chores and even sitting down to watch a documentary with her. It was one on Mark Twain and his works, to which both Karl and his mother found rather interesting; satirical works by Twain were always so fascinating to decode.

Nonetheless, he went about his Sunday comfortably. The party from the day before had drained his social battery anyways, so a nice, relaxing day was what he needed. Still, though, the buzz from the day before remained, as well as the fond memories of him and Sapnap. He was rather excited to see him again, one way or another, at school or at home.

Until then, Karl enjoyed the last of his weekend with his mother and dreamt of more encounters with the boy who felt the same about him.

## Chapter End Notes

This one is a little shorter than the usual, but I figured it'd be a good transition between the last and the next. Speaking of the next, it's practically done, as it was originally part of this chapter.

Hope you guys enjoy this one! As always, leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter :)

## Per Usual

### Chapter Notes

TW // None

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Monday came around, Karl rose from his bed, and performed his usual routine of getting ready for the day. He stops by his calendar, noting that his midterm in his classes that had one were approaching rather quickly; one of those being Chemistry.

In his time helping Sapnap learn the unit, he had barely touched on studying. Sure, he did a review sheet here and there, but they were all rather easy and not at all what he meant to truly study on. The effort he would usually put in simply diminished, and he's not sure if that was a good or bad thing.

Perhaps his time spent with Sapnap affected that, and most likely, it did. However, in the time that they did spend together, he enjoyed it more than he would have hunched over his desk studying chemical reactions. Therefore, in Karl's mind, he was winning this way, where his social life was a little more fulfilling than the mediocre studying aspect of it all.

There's still the little voice in the back of his head nagging at him, though. In all his years of living, he knows that he probably *should* be studying, but he doesn't allow that to get to him, not yet, at least.

Upon pulling up to the school, he meets up with the other two nimrods, and the three of them go about the halls on that Monday morning.

All had been rather customary, until Karl reached his locker, to which a certain Sapnap awaited him. He smiles at him, and waves at the two. Niki raises an eyebrow at Karl before looking back to the boy in front of them as they make their way to their locker.

“What’re you doing here?” Karl asks, wondering why the boy was at his locker this morning. Sure, he was excited to see him again, it was just that he didn’t realize he’d see him first thing in the morning.

Sapnap’s got this glow on his face, “Figured I’d stop by and maybe walk you to class this morning.”

Karl feels his cheeks grow warm. It was so nice of him, and not at all what Karl expected first thing Monday morning.

Niki has already gotten her books out of her own locker, and instead of waiting for Karl, she winks at him and leaves for their class. He would have to tell her about the walk when he gets to class.

“Any particular reason why you wanted to today?” Karl asks teasingly, knowing the answer.

“Mmm... I think you know why,” Sapnap plays, raising his eyebrows slightly.

Karl giggles, pulling his books out, “Really? I don’t think I know, exactly.”

“Well, I wanted to see you again,” Sapnap admits. Karl can’t help but smile at the thought of Sapnap wanting to encounter him more - and get to know him more, for that matter of fact.

Karl shuts his locker, “You get to see me after school today, y’know,” he signals for Sapnap to walk with him, to which he does, “and maybe even lunch if you feel like it...”

He alludes to Sapnap coming to lunch with him today. He hasn’t mentioned it to Niki or George yet, but he figures that they’d be okay with it, seeing as they were in full support of whatever they had going on at the moment.

Sapnap hums in amusement, indicating that he understood what Karl was trying to get at. “True, I suppose but still,” he presses, “allow me the honor to walk you to your first class of the day.”

Karl nods and agrees, allowing him to do so. They walked down the hall to Karl’s next class. Granted, it wasn’t a long one, in fact, it was one of the shorter treks Karl had to make in regard to his other journeys on the large campus, however, the walk was nice.

They spoke about Karl’s Literature class and the next book he planned on reading, considering he had finished *The Great Gatsby* last week. Sapnap mentions something about the novel.

“Have you seen the movie, by any chance?” Sapnap spontaneously asks, brushing along Karl’s shoulder as they go down the hall.

“Which one?” He asks, aware that there were many, even if he hadn’t seen any of them yet.

Sapnap answers him, “The newest one. The one with DiCaprio.”

The boy, in reply, shakes his head. He was wary of the newer film, as he’s heard that it was more modern than it should be for a book about the twenties. He wonders why Sapnap’s asked, so he asks away, and Sapnap answers.

“Well, I haven’t seen it either and...” he thinks for a moment, “and maybe we could see it together? It’s on Netflix, and we could see it at my house.”

Karl doesn’t think much of it, only that the boy was inviting him to a little screening of the book he read.

“That sounds nice, totally,” Karl agrees, much to Sapnap’s surprise.

He’s taken aback, “Wait, really?”

Karl nods his head, “I mean, why not?”

An idea pops in his head, remembering that the other two would be interested in it as well.

“And Niki’s read the book too, she could come too- and George, George loves DiCaprio,” he rambles. He remembers that George did indeed have a thing for the certain Leo, even if he looked rather different from his younger years (although, that didn’t seem to stop George from having admiration for him).

They were nearing his classroom, with only a few more doors down. Most kids in the halls were already in their classes. They had taken a little more time than usual getting to Karl’s class.

“Oh- oh yeah, sure, they can come too,” Sapnap says. Karl nods, he’s excited to have the four of them watch the film.

Karl slows down as they approach his class, “Awesome, let me know about the date and time and whatever we need to bring.”

With that, he swings into class, and takes his seat next to Niki, who awaits him patiently. Immediately, she pesters him with questions about their little walk together. Class was starting though, and the rest of the students had been rather quiet, working on whatever had been assigned on the board.

She whispers to him, “What did you guys talk about?”

Karl begins to pull out his work for the day, “Just some movie thing, you and George are invited to come too,” he equally whispers back.

Niki looks rather confused, she cocks her eyebrow, “Movie? What movie?”

They remain speaking in a hushed tone, trying to keep quiet in a silent classroom.

“Gatsby. Sapnap invited me to see the film at his house, so I invited you guys to come with since you’ve read it and George loves Leonardo DiCaprio.”

She smacks his arm rather harshly, eliciting a small yelp from Karl. A few students look up at them, but none linger, only returning back to their work.

“What was that for?” Karl whispers roughly, rubbing his arm from the impact.

“You invited us on your date with Sapnap, you idiot,” she scolds him.

Date?

It had been a *date*?

Karl clearly did not get the memo if that was what Sapnap meant by ‘watching a movie’.

“What?” he whispers back, confused by her statement.

“We should be *working*, should we not?”

His teacher scolds them, looking from her spectacles at the two in front of her. Karl winces and replies with a meek, ‘yes ma’am’ and Niki, ‘sorry’.

The two continue their work until the bell rings, to which they go their separate ways and don’t have the time to talk about their previous conversation. Niki says that they’d have to continue at lunch with George before going left as Karl goes right.

Sapnap doesn’t walk with him this time. Karl figures that it was because of how far his next class was, although he didn’t know what his next class was or where it was located. He hopes that was the reason and not the fact that Karl turned away his offer of a ‘date’.

He goes through Chemistry replaying their talk. Perhaps Niki was wrong, and that it wasn’t a date. He doesn’t want to think about if it were an invitation to one.

Karl must’ve spaced out for quite some time, as for when the bell rang for him to go to lunch, he realized he had barely touched the work for the day. He’ll have to finish that tonight for homework.

He leaves the classroom and dashes for the lunch room. Karl doesn’t want to see Sapnap just yet,

feeling embarrassed for misreading the tone and implication of his invitation. He tries to weave through the people and does so successfully, making his way to his booth seat and taking a seat with Niki.

When George arrives, they go over the morning walk once more.

“Oh Karl, honey,” George coos, pouting his lip, “he definitely was asking you out on a date.”

Karl groans and puts his forehead against the table in shame. He really had royally screwed this up.

“Really?”

“Really.”

He pulls his head up again, looking at his food. He had suddenly lost his appetite.

“Just talk to him. He’ll understand that you made a mistake,” George suggests, stealing a chip from Karl, “besides, it’ll be more funny if anything.”

Karl sighs and thinks to himself. He hopes that was the case.

“Yeah! And you’ll see him after school today, right?” Niki asks, gesturing towards Karl. He nods. They were supposed to go over some more calculations later that afternoon.

Niki continues, “Just talk to him then. It’ll be fine, don’t worry.”

He doesn’t want to worry about it, so he tries not to. However, his thoughts get the best of him, and he’s left worrying anyways.

Karl’s probably more worried about what the date entailed more than messing up the invitation in general. He had never gone on a proper, intentional date.

Perhaps that was more of the root of his worries. Karl knows how understanding Sapnap was anyways; it was just the idea of a real date that got to Karl’s head.

As much as he appreciates Sapnap offering something away from the public eye, he still gets anxious thinking about it. It’s just a movie, he thinks, but still, a rather intimidating one, at that.

Though, if Karl’s learned anything in the last three weeks, it was that sometimes, you have to take risks; that you have to step outside of your comfort zone. The concept, in and of itself, was simple, yet the execution of said concept was a different deal.

It isn’t until the end of the day when he realizes that he was going to eat lunch with Sapnap today. He groans at this. So much for seeing him throughout the day. It makes him feel even worse when the boy shows up at his front door that afternoon.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

It was awkward, and Karl doesn’t know if he’s the one making it awkward or if it were a combined effort. He hopes that it was just him thinking it and not Sapnap, for that would make it even more embarrassing than it already is.

They go up to his room again, taking their usual positions. Karl teaches him what he needed to know before working on the sheet he had barely completed in class today.

It takes all of him to bring up the past morning.

“So... this morning...” he starts, not knowing exactly where he was going with this just yet.

Sapnap hums and asks, “What about this morning?”

“Were you asking me out on a date or...” Karl trails off, voice going quiet. He chooses to keep his eyes on the paper he didn’t finish in class.

He hears some shuffling from the bean bag Sapnap sat on. There’s a slight pause, and then he speaks.

“Honestly, yes,” he admits, to which Karl winces, “but it’s okay, we can watch it with Niki and George. Whatever makes you feel more comfortable,” Sapnap assures, returning back to that patient tone, similar to the one he had that past Saturday night.

Karl appreciates how tolerant Sapnap was of him. Karl knows that he, himself, was more reluctant than most. He fears that he’s moving awfully slow, although it had only been two days since their confessions to one another.

He doesn’t want him to lose that patience, nor does Karl want to be the one weighing down whatever they had going on for them. So he tried to gather up his courage to agree to the date, but that was becoming rather difficult.

“I’m sorry, I just,” Karl sighs quietly to himself in shame, “I didn’t realize that you meant *that*; I thought it was a group-type of hangout.”

He looks up for a moment at Sapnap, who has an understanding look on his face. It’s soft, and not at all judging.

“Karl,” he gets up and sits on the bed facing Karl, who was sitting on his chair away from him, “don’t be sorry. It can be a group thing. Like I said, whatever *you* feel comfortable with.”

His cheeks feel hot. Why Sapnap was so kind and thoughtful, Karl will never truly know nor grasp, but he’s thankful, so utterly thankful for it. Which is why he wants to offer some steps to the direction they *both* wanted to go in. He turns around slowly to face him, with hands fidgeting in his lap.

“I know, I know,” they lock eyes for a second before Karl looks down at his fingers, “but I don’t want to hold us up or anything,” he mumbles.

Sapnap reaches for his hand, to which Karl gives him, allowing him to hold it softly.

“You’re not holding anything up, silly,” he rubs his thumb into Karl’s knuckles, making tiny circles, “I’m okay with going at your pace, you know? Baby steps.”

Karl’s not usually an emotional person, yet, this boy, this singular boy, has made him feel so much in such a short amount of time.

He doesn’t think he could get over how understanding he was, and for some reason, it makes his chest feel warm and head feel fuzzy.

It’s here that Karl realizes that perhaps he isn’t exactly ready yet. As much as he wants to do it and get it over with, he recognizes that it’ll take a little bit more time. Besides, he wants to enjoy it when it comes, and thus, he agrees.

“Okay,” he says quietly, “can it be a group-thing?”

Sapnap chuckles, “Of course it can be a group thing. I can even invite Dream to make it more of a ‘group thing’” he adds.

Karl nods. That sounded really nice to him.

“Thank you,” he says, genuinely.

Sapnap lets go of his hand and his lips turn into a goofy grin, “Don’t thank me. Now tell me how to do number three, because I still have no clue how to do this.”

They both laugh at that and Karl agrees, showing him once more how to solve the problem.

So it was a date-ish. Karl wishes he could go there, but he knows he’s not ready. Not yet, at least.

It was funny to think that he had his first kiss before his first date, which was odd and out of order. However, he thinks that everything happens for a reason, and it just so happens the stars aligned in that fashion.

By the end of the study session, they had discussed partially on what the plan was. They had agreed to hold it this weekend at Sapnap’s house. Gatsby was still on the table, but of course anything was open to their selection. Niki and George were, of course, formally invited to attend, and were always welcomed to do so.

It was going to be nice, even if it wasn’t necessarily a proper date or anything.

He just knows it.

## Chapter End Notes

I mean, what were we expecting?

I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! They're getting there, I promise :)

I wanted to ask, though, how you guys would feel if I started another series or posted short stories / oneshots? Don't get me wrong, I love this piece and have plans to continue it, but I've got some ideas that have been brewing! Do let me know if you guys are interested or not, and we'll go from there.

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter!

## Movie Night

### Chapter Notes

TW // None

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They planned for the group hang-out to take place that upcoming Saturday. George and Niki agreed to come, even though they were hoping for it to be a date between Karl and Sapnap. They were reminded that, well, at least George, owed Karl a favor. In all honesty, though, they would've come anyway.

Sapnap continued walking with Karl in the mornings, even catching him after Karl's second period to take him to lunch. Ever since that one study session, talking to one another returned to normal (not that it wasn't before, but Karl could note the difference).

The two would talk about what the day had to bring or had already brought them, occasionally taking an extra loop about the hallway to finish off quick stories before dropping Karl off at his class. As for lunch, Sapnap had yet to sit down and eat with them. However, in his defense, he was getting extra help from Ms. Jeanine and Karl could never criticize him for that.

Nonetheless, the study sessions throughout the week remained, and each time they met up, Karl felt more and more at ease with the brunette.

On Wednesday, they discussed how Saturday would go down. They still planned on watching *The Great Gatsby* and Sapnap only requested that Karl, and his two friends, bring themselves and nothing else.

However, Karl was, as any of his friends would note, stubborn. Stubborn as he'll get out of. The two of them had already been arguing for some time now.

"Karl," Sapnap sighed, not in annoyance, but rather playfully, "you don't have to bring anything. You're the guest."

Karl shook his head. He refused to have Sapnap provide for him and the others, even if it was only just a movie. It felt wrong not to.

"So? You provide the movie, we can provide the snacks," he replies in an attempt to reason.

Sapnap countered him, "I'm already making the snacks, though. And it's too late anyways because I bought the ingredients."

Karl doesn't let up, "Let us help."

The boy had been laying on top of his bed, looking at him upside down, "Nope," he says, popping the 'p'.

Karl groans and spins in his chair. He wasn't going to give up.

"What're you making, anyways?" He asks, wanting to know what he bought.

“Just cookies,” Sapnap states.

Karl raises an eyebrow. “I’ll have you know that I’m absolutely superb at cooking,” he states.

Well, that was true, the cooking bit. Though, while he did bake from time to time, it was not his strongest suit. Something about the exact measurements bothered Karl, as he really wanted to alter things and create something new; yet, such cannot be done without ruining the entire dessert at times.

Sapnap scoffs, “Good for you. You’re not going to change my mind, sweetheart.” He sits up and turns to face him, “Accept your fate, Jacobs.”

Karl huffs. He hadn’t planned for the boy to be equally as stubborn. Usually, his opponent would cave in, as Karl could go hours arguing. As stated before, they’ve been stuck on this for a while now, and neither showed signs of stopping soon.

However, Karl had an idea. If Sapnap wouldn’t let him bring something from the outside, then he’d have to infiltrate the inside.

“How about I help you beforehand,” Karl starts, choosing his words carefully, “like, I can make the cookies with you before anyone shows up?”

Sapnap thinks for a moment. Karl believes he’s got him, with an offer of just the two of them alone, baking. It would suffice the need to help and the underlying desire to spend some time together before the rest arrived, though Karl would never admit that.

“Fine, but you can’t sneak anything inside, okay?” Sapnap pulls a fuzz from Karl’s shirt, “I’m trusting you to only mix some batter and that’s it.”

From there, Karl promised – and even solemnly swore – not to harbor any other goodies in.

It had been a win on both sides.

Such brings Karl to now. He stands in front of Sapnap’s door, his fist a few inches from knocking.

It was a nice house, one that wasn’t as intimidating as Punz’s mansion, but wasn’t shabby or small. It was similar to Karl’s, only in a different neighborhood and was painted a navy blue instead a brilliant white.

Karl takes a deep breath before knocking on the door. He didn’t bring anything with him, only his keys, wallet, and cell phone.

On the other side, he hears small barking and a voice shout, ‘coming!’ Karl forgot Sapnap had pets, and if he remembered correctly, there was a dog and two cats.

The door swings open, and he’s greeted with a boy in an apron and a small, white dog jumping at his calf.

“Cash, get back in here,” Sapnap scolds, apologizing to Karl for the sudden intrusion. Karl giggles waving his hands as to say that it was alright. He didn’t mind the little thing, in fact, he found him rather cute than anything.

Stepping in, he breathes in the aroma of cookies from the kitchen. His mouth waters at the initial impact; they smelt so good.

Sapnap allows him to take off his shoes before leading him to the kitchen. A bowl rests on his counter, as well as a bag of flour and sugar, with chocolate chips scattered about.

Cash follows him as well, still jumping on him, and in response, Karl leaning down to pet his head. Cash was adorable.

“Put me to work” Karl demands, bringing himself up from petting the dog. Sapnap nods, handing him a whisk.

“I just put the first batch in, but I made too little. So... just whisk this,” Sapnap decides, pointing to a bowl, “do you need an apron?”

Karl shakes his head, being skilled enough to not make a mess on himself. Sapnap smiles at him, “Of course you don’t.”

Sapnap takes care of the oven while Karl follows the recipe on the boy’s phone. It was a simple chocolate chip recipe; nothing too fancy, yet a classic.

Cash continues to run around Karl’s legs as he stands, sometimes begging for a taste of what Karl’s making.

“If Cash begs, you just shoo him away, alright?” Sapnap tells him, noticing that the small dog was at his side.

Karl giggles, “it’s alright, I don’t mind.”

He puts the whisk down to measure what was next on the list. What was in was just the sugar and butter, so he still needs to crack the eggs and add all the other items in.

He cracks his eggs and mixes in the extract as well as the salt. His hands are shaky when measuring the baking powder, knowing that too much will cause the cookies to taste bitter and too little will make them flat and crumbly.

Sapnap’s washing some dishes in the meanwhile. Music had been playing in the background when he walked in. He tries to distinguish the artist, but he knows it’s something he hasn’t heard before. Granted, Karl only really listened to classical or anything on the radio.

Regardless of that, the music that had been playing faded away. Karl was now focused on the task at hand. He’s managed to measure out the baking powder just fine, having done it above the package it arrived in.

Now, he had the flour. The recipe called for two whole cups, and Karl was just getting onto the first.

He pours the bag into the cup slowly, jolting his body a bit to help the substance come out. His entire attention is set on pouring the flour out, as he sticks his tongue out slightly.

Karl manages to get the first cup done perfectly. Having done it once now, the second shouldn’t be all too difficult. The same process goes as before.

Eventually, Karl has mixed the last batch, handing it over to Sapnap to scoop up little balls to put into the oven. Karl helps as much as he can, but he’s not as skilled as scooping up the mixture and placing it on the sprayed, metal sheet.

When they finish, Sapnap slides it into the oven and sets a timer for it. Turning around, he chuckles

at the boy.

“What?” Karl asks, confused.

“Come over here,” he asks- well, more or so demands. Not knowing why, Karl finds himself doing so anyway, walking cautiously over to Sapnap.

He licks his thumb and wipes away at his cheek, “You’ve got dough on your face, silly.”

Karl scrunches his nose. Of course he had dough on his face.

Sapnap brings his thumb up to his lips, sucking the rest of the dough off. It sends butterflies into Karl’s stomach.

Something about the sight made Karl feel... different. He assumes Sapnap senses the sudden change in the atmosphere, pulling his thumb away from his lips slowly.

Karl’s more aware of how close they were now; Sapnap against the counter and Karl right in front of him.

Sapnap brings his hand up again, this time tucking a loose strand of hair behind Karl’s ear.

“There,” he says quietly, looking down into the boy’s eyes.

Karl’s legs feel like jelly. How someone could look so angelic in a messy apron, Karl wants to know - because Sapnap looked so angelic in a messy apron, leaning against a heated oven.

Before Karl could have a second thought, the doorbell rings, sending Cash zooming between the two, past the kitchen, and towards the door, barking about. The event startles Karl, and he steps away and turns towards the door.

He checks his phone, having missed several messages from his friends stating that they were on their way and there. He assumes it were them at the door.

“I’ll-I’ll get it,” Karl offers, “I’m sure it’s Niki and George.”

Sapnap nods and begins to untie his apron. Karl makes his way to the door and puts his foot in front of Cash, making sure he doesn’t bolt out when the door opens.

Behind the door was George, Niki, and Dream. He had forgotten Dream was coming.

“Mmm are those cookies?” George asks, stepping in.

From the kitchen, they hear Sapnap yell, “Chocolate chip!”

The three of them take off their shoes and make their way into the kitchen. Niki allows George and Dream to walk in front of them, pulling Karl to the side.

“Making cookies, huh?” Niki says low, taking note of Karl’s flustered state.

He shoves her lightly, embarrassed at the remark, having gotten what she meant. “Yes, just making cookies,” he confirmed.

Niki smiles and ruffles his hair. He knew she was just playing.

When arriving back into the kitchen, Karl helps Sapnap put away the leftover ingredients.

“Make yourself at home, guys. I’ve got cookies in the oven and drinks in the fridge. Anything in the pantry is fair game too,” he offers. Niki and George thank him for his hospitality.

Karl picks up the egg carton and sets it in the fridge. He doesn’t know exactly where it goes, but he guesses it were to be placed on the third row, having left a long strip of space.

“You’ve got a beautiful house,” Niki comments, looking at some of the pictures on the walls. The frames contain family photos of Sapnap and his parents, as well as two girls who look to be his sisters. They looked older than him though.

“Thank you,” Sapnap replied, putting away the last of the supplies, “not that I had any part in the decor, but thank you.”

George has pulled up the movie on Netflix while Dream puts the popcorn in the microwave. It pops, and Sapnap fetches a few blankets for the group. George points out the cast.

Apparently Tobey Maguire was in the movie. Karl didn’t know that till now.

When they’ve all relatively settled, the oven timer goes off. Dream and Sapnap get those prepared while Karl takes a seat with the two on one of the couches.

George whispers to Karl, “Did you guys make out again or...?”

Karl whacks him. Of course both of his friends assumed something more than just ‘baking cookies’. Karl wasn’t like that, but the others loved to wander about the ‘what if’.

“Not you too,” Karl complains. He shakes his head, “No, we didn’t.”

“We didn’t what?”

Sapnap was looking over the couch now, having appeared out of nowhere.

Karl stutters, “Uh- we didn’t bring anything, like we said.”

His adrenaline spikes at the interruption. Karl could’ve sworn that he was pulling out the cookies just then,

“Oh yeah, good. Here,” he hands them a bowl of popcorn, “freshly popped by yours truly.”

Dream swings around the couch, “He’s talking about me, of course.”

The way Sapnap’s living room was set up was that there were three couches curved about the TV mounted on the wall in the center. The couches were a bit small, only able to fit two to three people on it. One of them was just a chair too, so that left all them having to separate (which was a good thing, considering that Karl could not imagine trying to fit the five of them on the couch he squished himself onto now).

Niki took the single chair, sinking into it, getting lost in the cushion comfortably. Karl figured that she’d let George sit with Dream and himself with Sapnap. And that just happened to be the case.

Karl sits up against the armrest of the sofa, leaving plenty of room for Sapnap to take a seat next to him.

He didn’t know what counted as too close or too far, so he figured that taking the armrest would be a solid stance. Perhaps he was overthinking it, and he probably was, but that still didn’t stop him from calculating his movement.

Sapnap takes the seat next to him, also against the arm rest. Between them laid the bowl of popcorn, and the coffee table in front of them, the cookies.

The lights were now off and the movie had begun.

Automatically, Karl notices the drastic, and horrifying, changes from the book. He loves the book, and as much as he wants to comment on them, he chooses not to.

He's used to complaining with his mother in regards to movie adaptations, and those are a bit far in between. However, he was not with his mother, but instead the boy he liked, so he figured he'd save his comments till the end.

Instead, he drifts his focus to the one next to him. He was munching on some popcorn, invested in the film on the screen. The soft glow of the TV casts a shadow on the latter half of his face, but from what Karl could see, Sapnap seemed to be enjoying the movie.

Karl glances to his right, looking at George and Dream. They had been the opposite of what Sapnap and Karl were like, having already been tangled up in each other, sharing a blanket. George's head was against Dream's chest and Dream combed his fingers through the boy's hair.

They looked serene like that. The two were fit almost perfectly, as if they were meant to mold into such. Karl's just glad to see that it was working out for George.

Niki was still sitting comfortably in her chair. She glances at Karl and smiles at him, mouthing something along the lines of 'scoot over'. What a wing woman she was.

He turns his head back to Sapnap, who was still in the position he was before, reaching for popcorn and up against the armrest. He's got a blanket over him, and his back is relatively turned away from Karl.

The sight from George and Dream makes Karl not feel jealous per say, but something within him wants to feel how they did. There's a desire to be held like that- or at least be close.

It's odd, the feeling. Karl doesn't consider himself to be clingy or necessarily touchy, not as much as George was. He was more reserved and liked to keep to himself, so the want to get closer was peculiar.

Yet, Karl isn't the one to make such a move. Which was a shame, seeing as Sapnap respected him enough to not make the first move in case Karl didn't welcome it.

What a phenomenon.

Thus, Karl decides that if he wanted to further any movement, it would have to be done on his own accords. Which brings him back to square one: Karl had to make the first move.

He stops paying attention to the movie and changes his objective scooting closer. Karl doesn't know what the end goal really was, as he doesn't necessarily want to be all over him like George and Dream; although, to each their own.

Perhaps they could hold hands- or Karl could rest his head against his shoulder. Something simple, and not at all too eye-catching or telling. Afterall, they were just watching a movie, and with their friends to the right of them, so to speak.

Karl shifts in his seat, slowly pulling himself away from the arm rest and towards the bowl of popcorn. The same bowl that Sapnap was constantly grabbing at, the bottom nearly in sight in only

the first twenty minutes of the movie.

He figured that perhaps when the boy finishes it, he could set it down on the table or floor. That would leave him the room to scoot even closer.

Perhaps it was silly, and more complicated than he had to make it. However, it was plans like these that always worked out in the end, as Karl looks at every possible outcome.

Therefore, he waits. Frequently glancing down at the bowl, he waits for Sapnap to finish the popcorn. He, himself, even takes a handful to help, popping them into his mouth subconsciously.

Sapnap reaches into the bowl only to find it empty. He shrugs and turns back to the TV, and then leans over the coffee table to snatch a cookie.

Karl didn't look at this outcome, in fact, now that he thinks about it, there were only two ways this could have gone to begin with. He just assumed that Sapnap would move the bowl.

Now he has to, or he could wait, but he figured that he needs to take initiative.

With shaky hands, he picks up the bowl and sets it down on the coffee table. No one looks at him, and he feels relief while sinking back against the couch.

Here came the hard part, though. Now he really had to make the move.

He decides to scoot again by shifting in his seat. It's not suspicious, nor was it awkward. It was like he was just getting comfortable.

He manages to make an inch or two closer without the boy realizing his diabolical plan.

At least, he doesn't think he's realized it, until Sapnap turns and raises his eyebrow. Karl's been caught.

Karl blinks several times, not knowing what to do. He feels his cheeks go hot when he realizes that they were now staring at each other.

Karl plays with his hands in his lap, not knowing exactly what to do now. It may be this move that turns on the lightbulb in Sapnap's head, as he puts his hand out as an offering, to which Karl cautiously holds and intertwined his fingers.

Karl's hands are always cold, always being deemed frozen from his two other friends when transferring anything to them. Sapnap's hands are the opposite, being warm and calloused, fingers thick and rough from playing sports.

He's only held his hand once before, and that was earlier that Monday when Sapnap took his hand in his own to comfort. Now, they were simply holding hands, not tightly but not loosely; just interlocked to fit snuggly.

Karl takes this opportunity to jump a few more inches, allowing him ample room to move but also rest his head against Sapnap's shoulder.

"Is this good?" Sapnap whispers, squeezing his hand gently. Karl nods and exhales, hard work having been done to make it to this position. Hard work that lasted almost a full third of the movie.

Karl can feel Sapnap's smile as he turns his head back to the film on screen, and Karl feels rather accomplished for completing his mission.

He inhales the scent of his oh-so-familiar cologne. Karl doesn't think he'll ever get used to it, not that he planned to, but that it always drew him in. It's one aspect of Sapnap that he's gotten stamped in his memory, the familiarity of the cedarwood and lavender mix.

The way they were was nice, and innocent, at that. They were simply sitting besides each other, more or less watching a movie together.

Karl feels a slight squeeze-like pulse from the one next to him, making him smile to himself and squeeze once back, a sense of communication through pulses.

With his other hand, Kark reaches for the ring that adorned Sapnap's hand. He always wanted to look at it more closely.

He feels about it, twisting it slightly to reveal an engraving. In the dim light provided by the TV, he can't read it, but he can make out a few letters and numbers by running his thumb over them.

There's an 'A', 'X', and '16' written on it. He can't make out the rest, but he can guess there's a name and date on it. He figured he'll get a closer look later.

Karl spins it about his finger subconsciously, playing with it as he watches the movie.

When they get to the middle, Sapnap pulls away for a moment to readjust himself, cracking his back and stretching for a moment before pulling Karl close to him, with his arm wrapped around his shoulder.

For once, he doesn't overthink it, only allowing the boy to embrace him kindly. Karl realized that there were no expectations. If he wanted to pull away, he could, and if he didn't, he could stay. It makes him less tense and give into the heat from Sapnap's body and blanket.

It was funny how weeks earlier, the hand that rested on his shoulder left scorching marks, but now, the embraces only warmed, making him feel all fuzzy and safe on the inside. He believes it was the new found trust for the boy, as well as more experience in whatever was going on between them.

That in itself was something to discover. At the moment, they were just friends, close friends, but friends at that. Karl knows that the usual end goal was to be, and he'll never admit this nor say it confidently enough to own it, boyfriends.

He knows that when two people like each other enough, they'll end up dating, much like how he knows Dream and George will enter that phase soon enough.

However, to Karl, that idea seems... seems so far away. Not in terms that he'll never reach it, but that he isn't comfortable with getting there yet. He wants to experience the steps beforehand thoroughly, especially to know if that path is the one he wants to follow in the end.

That would be a decision to be made later, but now, as he's snug up against Sapnap, watching a god-awful adaptation of a book he enjoyed, Karl relishes in the moment of not having to decide. He simply exists.

He's pulled away from his thoughts when Sapnap's thumb moves back and forth across the top of his hand. Their fingers weren't laced up like earlier, but instead just palm in palm.

The end of the movie had arrived, and Karl feels like it had gone too fast. Sure, he noted all the things the film did wrong, but the majority of it was spent enjoying their embrace.

He doesn't want to let go just yet, but has to when Sapnap whispers to him that he has to go turn on

the lights. Karl allows him to do so, letting go of his hand and scoothing over.

He looks over at George and Dream, who were relatively in the same position as before, all snuggled underneath the blankets. Niki was on her phone, with one leg crossed over the other, leaning back into the couch. Karl hopes she enjoyed herself.

When the lights flicker on, everyone groans at how bright it was. Sapnap only chuckles and apologizes half-heartedly for not warning anyone.

Karl thanks George and Niki for coming before they leave with Dream. Apparently Dream had driven them here in his jeep, having already picked up George for their day together.

Now it was only Karl and Sapnap, not for a long though, as Karl too needed to return back home. The time had flown them by quickly, the clock reading 9:14 at night.

“Thank you for coming, by the way,” Sapnap says, picking up empty bowls, “I uh, really enjoyed tonight.”

Karl helps out, handing him a bowl, “of course- and thank you for, well, for being chill with inviting Niki and George.”

Sapnap smiles at him taking the bowl, “They’re invited anytime. Any friend of yours is a friend of mine.”

Karl feels all giddy on the inside, as the support from Sapnap fueled him. It was nice to hear it again.

The night really had gone very well. It wasn’t as intimidating as it seemed to be at the beginning. In fact, Karl probably could’ve gone the night without the presence of his friends. He appreciated them coming, helping him settle his nerves, but he realized that even if they weren’t there, some way or another, Karl would’ve found comfort in the scene.

Sapnap just did a damn good job at making him feel at home.

Karl finds himself wanting to stay just a bit longer, finding console in the air. However, as stated earlier, he should be getting home. He wants to know though, of the next time they’d spend with each other.

Sure, the study sessions were nice and all, but they opted to actually study and not mess around, as the midterm was a little after Halloween.

Halloween.

The reminder gives Karl an idea.

“Do you uh,” he pauses for a moment, his nerves almost getting to him, “have any plans for Halloween?”

Sapnap raises an eyebrow, and a smirk draws across his face. “Are you asking me if I’m free, Jacobs?” He asks, teasingly.

Karl bites his lip, “Maybe… I was just wondering, that’s all.”

“Well if you want to know,” Sapnap answers, “Dream and I usually take his sister and a few of her friends trick-or-treating, but after that, I’m not doing anything.”

Karl feels like he could fist bump the air. He assumes that they didn't stay out that dark anyways, as he's heard from George that she was like thirteen this year and Dream's pretty protective of her.

On past Halloween's, Karl could be found watching classics like 'Coraline' and 'The Nightmare Before Christmas' with his two friends. Sometimes they'd dress up, but if they weren't going anywhere, they'd be in Karl's living room eating Niki's 'Halloween Crack Chex Mix'.

He knows though, that Minx always held Halloween Bashes on the day. Granted, they weren't as elaborate or as magnificent as Punz's were (not that he personally knew, but from what Niki's told him), but since Karl doesn't necessarily mind the scene, perhaps they could all dress up and attend her party this year.

He'll have to ask Niki about it, but he figured he'd check in with Sapnap to see if he had any plans.

"Maybe we can do something? I've got to ask Niki about the details, but Minx usually holds a party and maybe... maybe we could go?" Karl asks, extending the idea out to the boy.

Sapnap gives him an odd look, "I didn't take you to be one to go to another."

Karl shrugs, "I didn't hate the last one."

It was true. He didn't necessarily dislike the last one. Sure, he nearly got puked on and it was rather overwhelming, but Karl enjoyed his time with Sapnap.

The dancing was exciting as well as the time spent together. So he figures that with a smaller, more personal, setting, he'd be able to have fun and be around Sapnap more.

"If you want to go, then I want to go," Sapnap decides, "let me know what Niki says, and all that."

Karl nods.

Part of him can't believe that he'd invite Sapnap to a party. Out of all things out of character for Karl, this certainly takes the cake; if the kiss didn't before.

From there, Sapnap wraps up a platter of leftover cookies for Karl to take home to his mother. He wants to refuse, but as it was already 9:30 ish, he decides that arguing this late would do both of them no good.

Sapnap walks him out his house and waves him goodbye as Karl pulls out of the driveway.

The night was certainly one to remember, and one that advanced the two of them in their relationship.

As he drives home, he replays the night from beginning to end. The baking, the couch session, the invite; all of it had been so new and exhilarating, that it makes Karl's heart beat a bit faster whilst making his way down the street.

When he gets home, he's welcomed by his mother who was on the couch watching some sort of TV show. He offers her a cookie before sitting besides her and laying against her side to watch too.

He hopes for the next event to come as smoothly as this one did, whether that be a party or not, he can only hope and dream that it sends welcomed shivers down his spine and cocoons to open in his stomach.

Karl's last thought before drifting off to sleep on his mother's shoulder is the boy, which seemed to

be a reoccurring state of mind. He allows it to be though, and he's left snoring, imagining scenarios with the certain brunette in his slumber.

## Chapter End Notes

And so the plot thickens-ish.

I left in a few details that may or may not play a part for later \*wink wink\*

Hope you guys enjoyed this one, I certainly had fun writing it.

Also, thank you all for your feedback! I've got a new series in mind, so keep an eye out for that. I hope to write it in its entirety first before posting it, that way you guys can get steady updates. I learned my lesson since this work haha :)

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter!

## A Flame to Warm

### Chapter Notes

TW // Mention of violence, injury, & a cut (NOT SELF HARM)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Karl receives the news from Niki on Tuesday during lunch that Minx was indeed holding her Halloween Bash this year. She's surprised to hear from him too that he would ask, and be interested at that.

"I figured we'd do something more exciting this year, you know?" Karl offers, taking a bite from the leftover chicken parmesan he had last night. Somehow it was still good even though it was cold. He opted between left overs and another sandwich this morning and went the risky route.

Niki raises an eyebrow, "*You* want to go to a party?"

It was odd, sure, but yes, Karl did want to go to a party. If someone had told Karl Jacobs that he was going to want to go to a party, on his own free will, a few weeks ago, he would've laughed. Yet, now, here he was, asking Niki about Minx's Halloween Bash.

"What about a party?" George asks, interrupting, and then swinging into the booth seat.

Before Karl could answer, Niki beats him to it. "Karl's asking about Minx's Halloween Bash," she explains.

George has an expression close to Niki's initial reaction, "*You're* asking? That's quirky."

Karl defends himself, "I just wanted to know. Maybe we could all go this year."

The other two share a look. They're suspicious of what Karl was asking of her, and part of it made Karl nervous.

Niki purses her lips, "I mean, I'm *always* down for a good party, don't get me wrong," she sips her lemonade, "but I'm still going to question why you'd want to go all of a sudden."

To be honest, part of it was because he wanted to incorporate Sapnap into his Halloween. He figures that the party scene might serve them better than just watching movies at home - as a whole that is, and not just in regards to him and Sapnap.

It wasn't that he didn't enjoy movie night. He basked in it. It was just that he believes that parties would hold more freedom in terms of conversation and actually doing things than simply sitting idly in front of a screen again. And, unless Sapnap enjoyed nature documentaries as much as Karl did, then he doubts they'd find another common-ish ground to watch upon.

He wanted to spend his Halloween with *both* the boy and his friends. He thinks such could be done by going to the party with the three of them and then returning home to watch the classics with Niki and George alone, as it was tradition between them.

Besides, the three of them thoroughly enjoyed the last, so why wouldn't they enjoy it now?

“I liked the last one we went to,” he simply says, leaving it at that.

George rolls his eyes, “That’s because you hit first base with loverboy.”

Niki attempts to suppress a giggle from his remark, making Karl blush. He didn’t think about it like *that*. The kiss hadn’t even crossed his mind whatsoever.

“That’s what this is about, though, right?” Niki asks, now a devious smile forming, taking another draw from her lemonade, “Sapnap?”

Karl bites his lip. He doesn’t want it to seem like he’s abandoning his friends, when in fact it was the opposite.

“Yes and no,” he starts, taking a deep breath, “I want to spend Halloween with Sapnap too. So I figured that, maybe, I don’t know- we could all just go to another party, or something.”

“We could still watch our movies afterwards- like we always do,” he adds, noting how he still wanted to follow tradition, “but I also want to... you know, hang out with him.”

As he’s saying it, he realizes that it did sound really... really scummy; like he was trying to convince the others to come to a party just so Karl could be around Sapnap. At the core, it certainly gave off that vibe, but he can assure that he wants *all* of them to enjoy themselves.

At the same time though, the two *were* more than supportive of his recent ‘advances’ with Sapnap. If Karl remembered correctly, they were the ones to start ‘Operation: Karl Gets a Bitch’ after all.

Niki nods and looks at George to see if he was on the same page. He squints his eyes, swirling his milk carton in his hand. The anticipation was killing Karl.

“As long as we still watch those movies and eat my Chex mix, I’ll be down to go to Minx’s party,” Niki decides, “what about you, George?”

George smirks, clicking his tongue, “If you wanted to dress up sexy for him this Halloween, all you had to do was-”

Karl interrupts him loudly, knowing that whatever was going to come out of George’s mouth next would be utterly inappropriate, “Cool! Cool, then we’ll be going to the party, correct?”

The two others snicker and nod. That’s all Karl had to hear.

Karl makes it through all his classes fairly quickly. He spent a good amount of time in each one deciding what costume he’d go with this year since, afterall, it *was* a Halloween party. Karl ends up coming to terms with having to consult both George and Niki on the matter, so he leaves that up for the upcoming weekend or whenever they have time to hang out.

Upon arriving home, he notes that his driveway’s empty, seldom Karl’s own car. Walking through the door, his eyes fall to the neon yellow sticky note placed on the side table against the wall.

His eyebrows knit together as he reads it. All it reads was that his mother was called for an emergency from work and that she wouldn’t know when she’d return. She also said to not wait up for her, in case she arrived home later than expected. He appreciates the note, and folds it up, sliding into his pocket.

Arriving home alone was typical, except on certain days when his mother's shifts changed. This week, she was scheduled to be home till five-ish, taking night shifts all across the board. Hence why she left the note.

He takes off his shoes and checks his phone. There was about two hours before Sapnap would arrive from practice for tutoring. Not wanting to waste any time till then, he decides to start on work for his other classes.

Karl spends about two hours on his character analysis project for *The Great Gatsby*, managing to tackle two out of the six he has to deal with.

When the hours pass by, he sets out his Chemistry work. Sapnap should be arriving soon.

He twiddles his pencil between his fingers, taking a small break from the analysis work. The disaster of the movie from the other day made him appreciate the book more, which, in turn, helped him distinguish the most important aspects of each character.

He's able to draw plenty of quotes and conclusions to what they mean, but at the expense of the amount of effort he puts forth in doing so.

Thus, he's leaning back in his chair, reading an article on koalas to take his mind off of the project for now. He enjoys the times when he can just skim through articles like those.

He decides to take a break until Sapnap arrives, which should be in about ten or fifteen minutes.

It isn't until he's sifted through *several* koala articles that he realizes that it had been an hour without any word from Sapnap.

He makes sure that he hadn't missed a text or call through checking his messages and recents, seeing nothing from the boy. He worries for a moment, but suspects that perhaps practice was being held longer than usual, and that Sapnap hasn't been able to reach his phone yet. However, this puts Karl at six o'clock, and he doubts that Sapnap would show up for half an hour only.

He's been told before by the brunette that practices were starting to get longer as they won more games. Which, in hindsight, made sense. If the team was progressing further in their bracket, then practices would go longer to promote a more strategic outlook on the next game.

Karl doesn't know if that was necessarily the case, but from what he could gather, that explanation made the most sense.

He figures that Sapnap would text him that he was unable to make it, which was fine, seeing as it didn't do much harm to Karl who knew the material.

So he settles on preparing dinner instead. He hopes that his mother will return home, but in case she doesn't, he makes enough for her to eat later and bring to work tomorrow. Karl knows that even if she were to return late tonight, she'd still be called in in the morning. It's just the way it went sometimes.

Karl slides his phone into his back pocket before trailing down the stairs. The sun was beginning to set, as days were becoming much shorter as October went along.

Upon entering the kitchen, his bare feet meet cold tile, sending shivers up his spine. He winces at the sudden change in temperature and flicks on the light. Although being rather harsh in its environment, Karl found the kitchen rather welcoming.

It carried everything he needed to create, the shelves never bare enough to limit himself (even if ingredients did begin to diminish, Karl found many alternatives to the essentials).

Crossing to the fridge, he peeks inside to see what he could do. Karl bites his lip, eyes scanning across the rows. Across the top lays the milk, and below it, meats and cheese, and vegetables towards the bottom. The middle held room for where he'd put any leftovers or miscellaneous items that didn't fit in the other categories.

After a minute, he decides to make a cherry tomato and parmesan based pasta, topped with fresh basil from the garden in the back. His mother and him planted a small herbs based garden during the past summer, and as winter approached, the plants began to wilt away. Karl wants to make the most of what they've got left before they'd have to start buying from the supermarket again - and herbs were a little too expensive for all the store provides (which was not much, from Karl's experience).

He's preparing the pasta sauce when he hears the doorbell ring. Karl sets his ladle down and turns the heat lower on the oven, just a safety precaution so his mother doesn't return to a crisp of a house.

He assumes that his mother might be home and perhaps had forgotten her house keys, which wouldn't be the first time.

Going over to the door, he peeks through the little hole that's a little too tall for Karl. On the other side, he recognizes the culprit at the door as Sapnap immediately, and not his mother. Karl swings the door open.

Before him stood Sapnap in a pair of sweatpants and loose t-shirt, as well as his backpack on him. What stood out the most though was the horrific beginning of a nasty bruise on his face, accompanied by a small cut on his cheek.

“Hey-”

“Oh my god- what happened?” Karl reaches out for his face without a second thought, examining how swollen it was compared to the other side. Whatever happened had truly done a number on him, as it concentrated at his cheek bone to his eye. Karl worries it got his nose too.

Blotches of reds and light purples dance across his face, staining his skin. A few pops of red appear close to the cut at his cheek bone. It looked to be rather fresh, and turning color quickly.

Sapnap winces, “I had a nasty fall at practice, that's all.”

Karl shakes his head, taking him by the hand and pulling him inside. He leads him to the couch and tells him to sit there while he gets his first aid kit.

His mother, being the nurse she was, stashed plenty of medical grade items throughout the house. First aid kits, as well as what Karl considered to be ‘survival packs’, were littered throughout closets and small hideaways.

Going to the closet under the stairs, he locates one out of four first aid kits in the house. Karl rushes back to the couch in the living room, opening up the kit on his coffee table in front of the injured boy. He pulls out items he knows his mother has used whenever Karl had a cut.

“A fall doesn't do this,” Karl notes, gently holding his jaw to look closely at the cut. It was deep enough that it drew blood, and it looked like Sapnap had tried to stop the bleeding, as it was starting to harden around the edges. The job had looked hurried, almost careless if Karl didn't

know any better. It instills more concern within Karl.

“I got hit by a football and *then* fell,” Sapnap explains, sighing. He’s calm for someone who got mauled by an air-inflated, leather ball.

Karl purses his lips and rips open a wet toilette pack to rid the cut of any surface dirt, “Don’t you wear helmets for this reason?” He asks, dabbing the surface. He sounds a little panicked, voice shaky although his hands tell a different story.

“This was after I took it off,” he furthers, and then places his hand on Karl’s shoulder, his hand large enough to be able to rub his thumb into the crevice between his muscle and collarbone, “Hey, I’m alright, okay?”

Karl stops for a moment to look him in the eyes. The boy’s pupils were dilated, and a lazy, small grin had taken form on his face. He was so serene and nonchalant about the whole debacle that it made Karl feel like a helicopter mom.

“It was just an accident, there’s no need to be so worried,” he attempted to reassure the boy.

Yet, Karl couldn’t help but worry. It pained him to see any of his friends injured, and even more so when it was Sapnap. Something about him in particular made Karl’s heart beat just a tad bit faster, and the adrenaline and fight-or-flight instincts kicked in.

It was ironic, though. Football was such a physical contact based sport that Karl should’ve expected something of the sort to happen. From the last two games, he’s seen plenty of times men be flown about, hurling straight towards the turf quicker than a blink of an eye. It was inevitable that, eventually, Sapnap would suffer a similar fate, only, Karl never expected himself to be the one to patch the player all up.

“How can you expect me not to? You look like you’ve been jumped,” Karl exaggerates. If Karl didn’t know any better, he definitely would think Sapnap got jumped. The imprint left on his face could’ve been caused by a fist, or even worse, a weapon of sorts. It makes Karl’s chest tighten.

“*Here?* In *La’Mahnburgh*?” Sapnap grips his free hand and squeezes, “Sweetheart, I’m fine, okay? I promise.”

Karl exhales. The town *did* have one of the lowest crime rates in all of their state, not that Karl would particularly purposely know; yet, he did, after researching a little too much into a project in his past psychology class regarding a criminal’s mind.

Though, Sapnap’s comment and squeeze makes him feel a little bit more at ease, but it still didn’t change the fact that he was still bruised and cut.

“I’m still going to fix you up though. You did a horrific job at cleaning this,” Karl notes, half-heartedly, giving a final squeeze. Sapnap lets go of his hand to allow him to finish cleaning up the top of the cut.

He rolls his eyes, “Thanks,” he says sarcastically. Karl smiles to let him know that he was joking.

“Was there no medic on the field? They really need to start putting medics on the field,” Karl decides, looking through his kit for a bottle of what his mother used to thoroughly clean cuts.

Sapnap laughs at this remark, “We’re big boys, we can handle ourselves.”

Karl deadpans, and then scoffs, “Of course. And that’s why *I’m* the one cleaning you up,” he grabs

a small cotton pad. Karl had a point, if they truly *could* handle themselves, then he wouldn't be here attending the wound.

He receives a chuckle from the boy, "Fine. You got me there, honey."

Karl rolls his eyes at the nickname, pouring some of the cleaner onto the cotton pad, "Hush. Now hold still, this might sting."

*That* was an understatement, as for what he was about to do, it was *most definitely* going to sting. He gives the boy a warning, which was more than what his mother used to give him. Karl knows that if he was told by his mother that something might sting, it was certainly going to sting, and sting badly at that. Thus, young – and old – Karl would thrash about and refuse to take the care.

Karl uses one hand underneath his jaw, and holds firmly in case Sapnap snapped his head away from the initial contact. He feels the stubble from his chin, and it almost tickles his fingers as he grips the corner of his jaw.

With his free hand, he runs the pad over the cut gently. Sapnap winces and hisses. He feels bad for hurting him, but if he's learned anything from his mother was that the sting was not as bad as an infected wound (although, a cut that size would probably not get horrendously infected). Karl mumbles a small apology before grabbing a bandaid.

"Thanks for the warning," Sapnap says, scrunching his nose.

Karl gives him a sympathetic smile as he picks out the bandaid to fit the size of the cut. His fingers are blessed with the stability his mom has.

"You could just be my own personal nurse," Sapnap offers, the stinging subsiding.

Karl shakes his head. He doesn't think he could stomach all that. Sure, he could handle a cut here and there, but it would pain him to see Sapnap get hurt in the first place. Perhaps that was the reason why he didn't want to go into the field like his mother.

"I could never," he decides, unwrapping the bandaid he selected, "I'd get too mad at the person who hurt you. I'd march on that field myself and give them a piece of my mind."

That too was true. Not as much as the more emotional side of why he couldn't, but it still was a factor in it. He'd get angry at whoever placed the hand on his boy. Karl wasn't one to get angry, however, he had a feeling he would.

Though, probably not angry enough to outright 'march on that field' as he so claimed. He just knows that he'd get protective, as he would if it had happened with any of his friends.

"Oh really?"

"Yes, really."

Karl places the bandaid and stands up to grab an ice pack. "Against six feet, two hundred pound men?" Sapnap asks, curious to see how Karl would respond.

He goes into his kitchen to receive one of his ice packs his mother left in there in case, "Okay, maybe I wouldn't," he returns, "just for your sake. I'd hate to embarrass you on the field."

Sapnap rolls his eyes and smiles nonetheless, "Why of course. I appreciate your consideration, Jacobs."

Karl wraps up the ice pack in a few paper towels, just so it wasn't icy cold against the boy's skin. "Anytime," he gives him the pack, "and there."

Karl takes a step back, proud of the job he had done on his face. With a bandaid and ice pack, Karl had cleaned up Sapnap as much as he could with his experience. If only his mother were here now, he has a feeling she too would be proud, although it was nothing compared to what her actual job entailed. This was child's play.

"Thank you Doc McStuffins, I feel good as new," Sapnap jokes, placing the cold brick against his cheek, "although, I think I'm missing something."

Karl raises an eyebrow. What had he forgotten?

Sapnap puts down the ice pack for a moment and taps his cheek, "Can I get a kiss on my boo-boo?"

The boy made Karl really think he had truly forgotten something, as his mind went straight to whether or not he was to put ointment on the cut before the bandaid. He doesn't think so anyways, even now knowing that all he wanted was a small seal of kiss on the site of the injury.

He moves onto the couch and pecks his bandaid, receiving a small sigh from the boy next to him.

"Feel better now?" Karl asks, now closing the first aid kit.

Sapnap nods, "Feel better indeed."

Karl leaves for a moment to set the first aid kit back where he found it. When he returns, he finds Sapnap to be in the same spot as before, checking his phone.

He takes a seat next to him, almost without a second thought. After having manhandled his face in such close proximity, sitting next to him felt like nothing.

The boy looks away from his phone and sets it face down on the arm rest. He taps his waist, as to ask if it were okay to hold him. Karl nods.

He's welcomed by the firm arm that slithers around his midsection comfortably, pulling him into the warmth from Sapnap's body. Ever since Saturday, Karl could really get behind being held by Sapnap, as it was never too tight nor too loose, but in fact, just right. Goldilocks style, might he add.

"I'm sorry," the boy with the ice pack apologizes softly, "I didn't mean to worry you, seriously."

Karl allows himself to rest his head against Sapnap's chest, "It's ok. I- I would've been worried either way."

Part of him is glad that Sapnap showed up. Of course, he's not glad that he showed up all bruised up, but he's glad that he came to Karl. It makes him feel more at ease, in a way, that Sapnap would show up anyways in the state he was in.

"I really, really appreciate you taking care of me," he tightens his grip slightly, "it means a lot."

Karl nods and exhales out of his nose, shoulders relaxing from the stress tension from earlier. They were getting sentimental now, and Karl's instinct was to shut it out, as feelings were never his forte. However, he finds himself allowing it to his heart hesitantly, as the barriers he kept up subconsciously were slowly being lowered with his time spent with Sapnap. He notices that

Sapnap's virtues were rubbing off on him.

"Of course," Karl says, clearing his throat, "it's uh, it's second nature, you know? With my mom and all that."

He hears a hum from above him and a nod. Karl leans back a bit more into the boy.. He felt mellow, as though he were a melting wax fitting into a mold.

Sapnap had a way with touch. At the beginning, it was frightening- not in the way that Karl was against it, but that the effects it had scared him. The way he made him feel just outright terrified him. He would feel his touch for days on, a ghost-like presence lingering in that one spot.

Now, it still lingered, but not as long. It was like he wanted more- that he was addicted to it, in a way. Karl doesn't know exactly what it all meant, but what he did know was that he enjoyed it, and cherished it.

Another moment, they sit with each other, until the next is ruined with Sapnap's stomach growling.

It wasn't the growling that necessarily ruined it, but instead the panic from remembering that Karl had a tomato sauce sizzling on the stove for who knows how long now.

"My sauce!" He exclaims, jumping from Sapnap's grasp and running to the kitchen. A sense of panic instills in Karl, dread filling his stomach.

He had completely forgotten that he was making pasta before Sapnap arrived. He got so caught up in taking care of him that the meal on the stovetop had left his mind, and now all he could hope for was that he took the pan off of the heat.

Karl races into the kitchen, nearly slipping on the tile as he spun about the counter. He checks the device in question.

Karl sighs in relief.

He had turned down the heat on the stove before Sapnap had arrived. The heat was incredibly low, as close as to being turned off without being turned off.

The sauce looked fine, only being slightly dried out. He would have to add more oil or something, but other than that, nothing was burning.

Karl leans against the counter on his arm to recover. His heart had leaped to his throat in the span of twenty seconds. It pounds in his ears, racking his mind.

Sapnap had followed him, "Oh my god, you were *cooking*? Is everything okay?" He, too, is also panicked, only less telling.

Karl takes a moment before nodding and pointing to the stove dial, "I turned down the stove before you showed up. I just remembered I was making it now."

Sapnap exhales, taking a seat at one of Karl's bar stools at the counter. "Thank god you did. Although, I think we would've smelt the burning long before now."

Karl lets out a sightful giggle. That was true, he's pretty sure that he'd notice the kitchen being burnt to a crisp before now.

He pulls open a drawer, taking a spoon to scoop some of the sauce up, hoping that it hadn't dried

out *completely*. It wasn't warm, nor was it cold, almost room temperature, really. The sauce still tasted as good as before, only the consistency being off.

"It's alright," Karl murmurs, not talking to anyone in particular. He had a habit of talking his way through cooking.

"What're you making?" Sapnap asks, peeking behind Karl as much as he can from where he's sitting.

Karl turns around, "Pasta sauce. Just cherry tomatoes, garlic, and a few herbs," he picks up another spoon and scoops some as well, handing it to Sapnap to try.

Sapnap brings the spoon to his mouth and hums, "It's good- amazing, holy shit, you weren't kidding when you said you were a good cook."

Karl smiles to himself, slightly proud at his skills. He had forgotten he told him earlier last week when debating on what to bring to the movie night. "Told you so," he grabs some olive oil, "although, it needs a little bit of this."

The boy at the counter only watches him, holding his ice pack up to his cheek and taking in the aroma dancing about the kitchen.

A thought weaves its way through Karl's mind once the pounding of his heartbeat fades away. It was getting close to dinner time, and he wondered if Sapnap would stick around for the evening.

"Stay for dinner?" Karl asks, swirling the sauce in the pan by making circular movement with his arm whilst holding the pan. He hoped that Sapnap would, seeing as his mother showed no signs of returning.

The boy thinks for a moment, and before he can answer, Karl tries to convince him some more.

"Please?" he continued stirring, "Pretty please?" Very rarely did he approach persuasion through begging, but he figures that the boy could perpetually take it to heart rather than logically.

Sapnap laughs at the attempt, "I haven't even said anything yet." That was true, but Karl could see the gears in his head turn immediately, debating if he could or not.

Karl shrugs and sets the pan down, "But you didn't say yes though."

The boy checks his phone and looks back up at Karl. Karl *really* didn't want to eat alone tonight.

Usually, he'd be okay with it, taking his meal up to his room and eating it while studying or watching something on his laptop. Though, tonight, after such a scare as well, he doesn't want to. He wants to share the meal with someone, and that someone just so happened to be Sapnap.

"Fine," he decides, "only because it's the least I can do after you took care of me."

Karl pumps the air with his fist, shouting a 'yes!' before returning back to the pan. Sapnap chuckles and continues observing from his seat.

Karl works around diligently, adding to the sauce as he goes and setting the pasta into a boiling pot. He decides that he wants to make some garlic bread, so he pulls out the ingredients for those as well.

"Is there any way I can help?" Sapnap asks, watching Karl run around the kitchen, checking on all

three pieces to his meal.

Karl shakes his head, “You just keep that ice on your face for me, I can handle the rest.”

So Karl does handle the rest. He prepares the rest of the dinner within the next fifteen minutes, only needing the bread to brown some more before he could pull it out. Sapnap assists him in setting up the table for the two of them, placing the plates on their place mats and forks on one side. Karl snatches two glasses, asking Sapnap what he’d like to drink (to which he replies with wanting water), and pours them both before setting them onto the table.

They both take a seat at the table, facing each other.

“The bread should be done soon, but other than that, bon appetit,” Karl announces, taking his fork and stabbing a few pieces. They both take a bite, and Sapnap moans.

“This is probably some of the best pasta I’ve ever had, Karl,” he compliments, wiping his mouth with a napkin, “seriously, this is- this is heaven.”

Karl rolls his eyes, “Or you’re just hungry, Mr. Wide Receiver.”

The boy shakes his head and takes another bite, this one larger than the last. He seems to be enjoying it though, either way. It warms Karl’s heart.

They both fell in a comfortable silence as they ate, both having not eaten since lunch, which was far long ago now. Karl sifts some more parmesan onto his plate, soaking up some of the moisture from the sauce. He offers the container to Sapnap, who looks up from his own plate, shaking his head.

It isn’t until a few minutes later until Sapnap breaks the silence.

“Have you ever thought about this?” Sapnap asks, taking a sip of his water.

Karl raises an eyebrow. Thought about what?

“Remember back in Olive Garden, when you said you didn’t know you wanted to major in yet?” Sapnap further explains.

Karl takes a moment to collect his thoughts. Of course he remembered the conversation. It had been one of their first, and one he had constantly replayed until they had study sessions together. He nods, humming a ‘yes’.

“Maybe you could do culinary,” he says, taking another bite of the pasta, “because I wasn’t kidding when I said this is probably some of the best pasta I’ve ever had.”

Karl chuckles. It was a nice compliment, but Karl had put not as much effort as he could in a sauce. He had opted for a dryer base of a sauce, rather than something creamy or juicy. Thus, he couldn’t fully believe that this had been the best pasta Sapnap could have, but he’ll take the compliment.

When he looks up at Sapnap, he had a firm gaze on his face. He looked to have been serious, not joining Karl’s chuckle.

“Are you serious?” Karl asks, taken aback. Surely he hadn’t.

The boy nods, “Dead serious.”

To be honest, Karl’s never thought of culinary as a career. He always considered it to be a hobby-

or in fact, more like a life skill he just picked up fairly quickly.

Sure, his mother and his friends adored his meals. However, that was the problem, he's only really known his own mother and his own two friends to enjoy them. The bias was too far to be considered as a proper critique or review.

Nonetheless, Karl does note that he found himself to be a bit better than most restaurants. Not to brag, of course, but he will take pride in his own dishes as he's the one who's made it; and the cook themselves is the worst critique.

"I uh, I never thought about it like that," Karl admits sheepishly.

Sapnap gives him a reassuring smile, "You should, because, this, *this*," he gestures towards the plate, "is absolutely delicious. Just some food for thought, though." The pun makes Karl crack a smile. He appreciates the compliment, though, he is a tad bit hesitant on venturing into the world of exemplary flavors as a career path.

The oven timer goes off, and Karl gets up to retrieve the bread. He slips on some mittens and pulls out the pan, placing it on top of the stove and then turning it off. The thought of the profession lingers in his mind.

Perhaps he could go to culinary school. It was something he genuinely enjoyed. Maybe Sapnap was onto something.

He puts the hot bread onto a platter, then takes it to the table. Karl warns him that it was hot, but Sapnap grabs one with his bare hands anyways. He waits though, before taking a bite.

He moans again, "See? Even this *bread* is heavenly."

Karl can't help but giggle, "It's just garlic, butter, and parsley. Nothing special, Sapnap."

He shrugs anyways, devouring the rest of what was in his hands. Karl's afraid he might just choke on it if he doesn't slow down.

"Think about it for me, will you?" He says, mouth full of the golden crusted bread.

Karl rolls his eyes playfully at the sight, but nods nonetheless. He'll have it in his thoughts for sure.

He looks at the clock. It was nearing eight, and he was wondering when Sapnap had to go home. He's never stayed this late before, always leaving at about 6:30 to return to his home.

"Are your parents back from their trip yet?" Karl asks, knowing that was for the empty house the past weekend. The boy shakes his head and checks his phone.

"Nah, they return on Wednesday, I think," he responds. He takes a bite from his pasta and looks up. "I've just been sleeping at Dream's for the past week, to be honest."

Karl figured that the two probably spent the night at each other's places. Afterall, Dream *did* have a mattress just blown up for Sapnap specifically in his own room, as George has told him before. He wonders if Sapnap did the same in his own room; keeping a mattress set out and ready to blow up when his partner in crime arrived for the night,

Karl's used to sleeping alone. As in, he was used to going to bed without another body in the house. It was either that he slept alone or woke alone, his mother slipping through the cracks of a door and creaking of steps in the middle of the night for her shifts.

“What about you? Mom at work?” Sapnap asks, now directly looking at Karl.

Karl nods, and then wipes his mouth with a napkin. “She got called in before I got home. I’ll probably see her tomorrow.”

Sapnap lets out a small ‘Ah’ before taking a gulp of water. “Home alone, then.”

Karl gives a light hearted smile. “Home alone,” he confirms.

They go quiet for a moment as they finish up what’s remaining on their plates. Karl nibbles on his bread, having finished his plate, and Sapnap drinks the rest of his water.

“Well,” Sapnap pauses, “and it’s up to you,” he adds, clearing his throat. Karl raises an eyebrow, curious to hear what Sapnap was to offer. “you could spend the night at my house if you don’t want to be alone.”

Karl feels his back stiffen up. He’s spent the night at George’s plenty of times, and even Niki’s once her parents got to know both Karl and George.

Though, this was different. Sleeping over a boy-you-liked’s house? It was nerve racking, to say the least.

He wondered what that would entail. Would they sleep in the same bed together? The same room? Even then, what pajamas does Karl pick out? Surely not his Pokémon jammies, for that would be too embarrassing to stomach. Or did Sapnap like Pokémon? The thoughts rush through his head quickly, creating traffic jams and the miniature Karls in his mind to run about.

Sapnap immediately notices the discomfort off of Karl, backtracking a bit, he follows, “You can say no- it won’t hurt my feelings,” he folds his hands, “I just figured I’d offer, since it was the least I could do after you’ve fed me and patched me up.”

Karl doesn’t know how many times Sapnap could be so reassuring and so kind as to not pressure him into doing anything. There wasn’t a day that went by where the boy didn’t ask or confirm with Karl if he was okay with any plans or movement or whatever the case may be.

He’s more worried about making a fool of himself before Sapnap could do anything to hurt him in any way, shape, or form. Karl’s concerned about whether or not he snores or if he moves too much too loudly; or if he talked in his sleep, and thus could reveal his buried dreams of the boy who would be in the same vicinity.

Yet, as daunting as all those details may seem to be, Karl knows that Sapnap wasn’t one to ridicule him. Sure, he poked fun, but even then, he’s never mean. He’s proven time and time again that he wouldn’t do anything Karl wasn’t comfortable with.

It was certainly a step in the right direction, but the only question was if it was too soon. They just started to get touchy, holding hands and borderline cuddling on couches. The progression seemed to speed up now.

It was a bit hypocritical though, to think of it like that. The two had kissed before they even held hands, let alone really become intimate with each other in any form. That, Karl could still not believe. That night felt like a distant memory, like one he was meant to relock and purely remember when the time was right.

Nevertheless, it’s new, and slightly frightening. Every step seemed that way, always being so mighty and too risky of a deed until it has been done, and from there, smooth sailing across calm

seas and clear skies. It doesn't stop Karl from worrying about what could happen; it was a vicious cycle at times.

He decides that sitting there in silence, debating himself in his own head wouldn't do. It would only make the situation more awkward than he had already made it out to be. Even then, through weighing his options, he realizes that there really wasn't much to lose, in a sense. Deductive reasoning proved to be a great aid in his decision.

Thus, he came to the conclusion that - and George and maybe even Niki would definitely tease him for it - sleeping over the boy's house wasn't the worst idea he could partake in.

"Yeah- no, that- that would be nice," he decides, voice having gone a bit raspy and shaky.

Sapnap looks a bit shocked, almost taken aback at his answer, "Are you sure? Like I said, you don't have to if-"

Karl cuts him off, not wanting to back on his decision now. "I know, and I still would love to," he reassures, knowing that the boy would continue to ask to ensure that Karl was okay with it. He wants to pull through with his decision, even if something hints at him to slow down.

Sapnap nods hesitantly, entrusting that Karl wasn't being pressured into doing it for his sake, "Then I'll clean up while you get ready, how does that sound?"

Getting up from his seat, Karl replies, "Sounds like a plan."

With that, Karl heads upstairs and makes a mental checklist of what he needed to bring and what he needed to do.

A large chunk of him still can't believe that he's opting to sleep over Sapnap's house tonight, but he's doing it. He's truly stepping out of his comfort zone, little by little.

He swings by his closet and snatches a t-shirt and a pair of navy blue sweatpants. He decides that the Pokémon pajamas would be for another day.

Karl gets ready for the night, packing his toothbrush, toothpaste, clothes for the following day, backpack for school, keys, wallet, cellphone, as well as taking a quick shower to wash away the day's grimes before turning off the light and heading back downstairs. When he does, he's met by the boy leaning against the front door with all his own stuff.

"I put your dishes on the drying rack and made sure the oven and stove were off before turning off the lights," Sapnap runs through, allowing Karl to think and make sure that was all that needed to be done.

He figures such to be the case, "That should be all. Ready?"

Sapnap's got a wide grin on his face, and he too replies with 'ready'.

Thus, the two of them walk out the door and Karl locks it in the process. Sapnap offers the back seat to hold Karl's belongings, to which he thanks him and does so before sliding into the passenger seat. He's never ridden in Sapnap's car, though from first glance, it was nicely kept, similar to how Dream kept his.

Although the moon had already peeked out, hiding behind the trees and rooftops of houses, Karl could sense that the night was far from over. Now driving with the boy who reappeared in his dreams, Karl sees his house grow smaller in the distance. Sapnap kept the radio playing softly in

the background, a station that played regular pop hits counting down the top ten of the night.

With that, a sleepover was due.

#### Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the wait! Hit a nasty writer's block, but thankfully, we got around it just fine, I think haha

Still kind of crazy to see my work on my own FYP? Also, when I see you guys recommend this piece and talk about it? Absolutely wicked! Thank you guys so much for the support, seriously. I will never get over how cool it is; I love this community and interacting with you guys <3

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter!

## Photographs

### Chapter Notes

TW // Anxiety, panic (minor)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They arrive at Sapnap's house in no time; his home abode only being maybe seven or eight minutes away from Karl's.

The ride had been rather quiet, but not quiet in an unusual way. It was comfortable, the silence that fell upon them being natural. Only the soft rumbling of the car on the asphalt and the hum of the radio played, and it was just enough to fill in what would be a dead void of silence.

The two exit the car, Sapnap grabbing his items from the back as well as Karl before walking up to the door together. It had gone completely dark now, the sun having now dipped below the horizon.

Barking can be heard through the door, and Karl is reminded of Sapnap's dog, Cash.

Grabbing his keys, Sapnap unlocks the front door, and out from it comes the little white dog, zooming around Karl in circles, making him giggle. Cash was such a treat, and his presence makes Karl want to have a Cash of his own.

Sapnap clicks his tongue and whistles, "Back inside, Cash. He's coming in with us."

Cash doesn't care. He jumps at Karl's legs, pawing at the fabric of his sweatpants. Sapnap sighs and smiles sympathetically, "He never listens. Just walk in, he'll follow."

So he does, and Cash does indeed follow him inside his house. The place had been the same as it was on the weekend, not that Karl suspected Sapnap decided to redo his entire interior, but he could get behind cleanliness.

Karl takes his shoes off with Sapnap, setting his stuff down to bend over and pull his laces loose. Cash sniffs Karl's shoes, taking one of the laces and tugging, dragging the shoe down the hall. Before he could get far, Sapnap snatches him up, holding him in one hand and taking the shoe away in the other.

"No Cash, that's not yours," he scolds, setting him down on the floor. Sapnap hands Karl his shoe back, "Sorry about that, he still acts like a puppy even though he's far from it."

Karl giggles, retrieving the shoe, "It's alright. He means no harm, I'm sure." He sets his two shoes on the top of the shoe rack, where Cash couldn't get them even if he jumped. Sapnap had advised him to do so anyway.

The two of them go upstairs, Karl following the boy through the hall. Sapnap opens the door to his room, allowing Karl to fully step in before closing it behind him.

The room had been about what Karl expected it to look like. In the center was Sapnap's full sized bed, and next to it, a bed stand table with a lamp. In the corner was a desktop computer, and in front of it a chair with his letterman jack draped across the back. There was a TV mounted in his

room in front of his bed, and below it a series of movies and knick-knacks.

There were shelves next to the windows, some of which contained trophies, pictures, and small figurines and comic books. He notes one of the comic books to be an old, vintage, Pokémon comic. So much for not bringing the Pokémon sweatpants.

All in all, Sapnap had a typical, teenage boy's room, and a clean one at that.

"Feel free to set your stuff wherever you'd like. I'm just going to take a quick shower, if that's alright with you," Sapnap offers, setting his stuff next to the door. Karl nods, putting his on the other side of the door.

"Yeah totally," Karl says. Who was he to stop him from *showering*?

The boy smiles before grabbing some clothes out of his drawer and going off to the bathroom that had been connected to his bedroom. Closing the door, Karl was now alone in his room.

He takes a seat on the corner of his bed, the mattress sinking beneath his weight. Taking a look at his phone, he figures he'd text his mom to let her know that he was sleeping over at his friend's house. He doesn't specify who's house exactly, but he would if she were to ask.

He felt... odd to say that he was sleeping over Sapnap's house. Karl had yet to really distinguish what Sapnap was to him yet. In hindsight, they were just friends, technically. Now, did Karl have certain feelings towards this *friend* that he didn't have with his other friends? Perhaps, but he digresses.

Karl sets his phone down onto the bed, observing the room a little more closely. He scans around, the soft glow of Sapnap's lamp illuminating the four corners of the room.

He sees plenty of photos of Sapnap and Dream, some ranging from when they were little kids to now. Karl stands up to get a closer look at them on the shelves.

There was one where the two were on a swing set, the photo being taken when the two jumped off. Even blurry, Karl could tell that they were happy, almost laughing. He wonders what Sapnap sounded like when he was younger.

Next to that had been one with both Dream and Sapnap, as well as Punz and Sam. The four looked to be about in middle school, all wearing a sort of jersey. Dream and Sam wore matching jerseys, one that Karl could identify as the ones used for soccer. Punz and Sapnap also wore matching jerseys, both being orange and black. The basketball in Sapnap's arm gave away the jersey type, the number reading '14'.

Karl snickers to himself. He had the same number as Troy Bolton.

He looks at a few more. They had relatively the same people in them, either being just Dream and Sapnap or a combination of the four mentioned earlier. He notices some players off the team, but he doesn't recall their names. There were one or two photos of the entire team together, with Dream and Sapnap holding a trophy in the middle.

Karl's been told before that their team has won several championships. George had mentioned that they were on a winning streak, and it made sense. The team was good, especially with the chemistry between each player. Even only having seen two games, Karl can tell that the trust between each member was great, reaching lengths that seemed impossible at times, but managed to score somehow or another.

He moves down the shelving, noting one in particular. There was framed one of Sapnap and this other boy, one that Karl couldn't recognize.

The boy wore a navy blue beanie, on it, the letters 'LAFD' embroidered in white. He was about Karl's height, only reaching about Sapnap's chin. The boy had his arm wrapped around Sapnap's waist, and Sapnap's own around his shoulders.

It was a fairly recent photo, the bottom dating only about a year ago-ish. A year and a few months ago.

Karl furrows his brows. It was the only photo of the two in the bunch. It was further down the line rather than being center or upfront. He reaches to pick it up, but stops, hearing the door behind him swing open.

He turns, the door revealing a certain, wet-haired brunette. He wore gray sweatpants and a white tank top.

Karl catches a glimpse of his midsection when Sapnap goes up to wipe his face with the collar of his shirt. For some reason, it hadn't clicked that Sapnap would be incredibly fit underneath his clothing, Karl never once seeing more than sweatpants or jeans and t-shirt or sweater.

In Karl's mind, he doesn't think he's ever focused on how attractive Sapnap was. He tended to find himself looking towards personality rather than looks, but there was something about him with wet hair, having just come out of the shower, that made Karl's stomach erupt with butterflies.

Sapnap was definitely attractive. His mother had pointed it out once before, claiming he was 'hot' (to which Karl scrunched his nose and looked away abashed), but Karl only really found him to be pretty, in a way.

The way his jaw line was defined, but leaving enough baby fat to fill in his cheeks. He wore a gorgeous smile with those cheeks- and the way he grinned with his eyes, how they scrunched up nearly closed to express his happiness.

It were traits like those that Karl really noticed, but now, as he's standing before him at his home, comfortably, Karl can tell what hid behind the jackets and sweaters.

Sapnap was toned and built from playing the sport, or well, sports plural, as Karl discovered through photos. His body was still damp from leaving the shower, and under the lights in his bedroom, muscles have never looked so good to Karl.

He's staring at him until the boy chuckles, catching him in the act.

"You like what you see?" He teases, a flirtatious smile settling onto his face.

Karl blushes. He didn't realize that he had been staring, let alone having said nothing but stare. He couldn't help it, the boy caught his attention.

"No," Karl lies, diverting his eyes from the sight before him. God, he was attractive.

The man in question took a few steps towards him, now *really* before him. In a low voice, he asked, "No?"

Karl could feel his body rising in temperature, and quickly, at that.

"N-No," he attempts to hold his ground, but falls flat when his voice goes soft. The boy exhales in

laughter, walking towards Karl, who still stood before the pictures.

“Man, I was really young in some of these,” Sapnap changes the subject, picking up a photo from when he was about seven. He was sitting against a bench of sorts, smiling at the camera lazily with his shirt open, the picture cutting underneath a gold pendant. Even when he was in his single digits, he was still a ladies man- or, well, a man’s man- whatever the case may be.

“You really have been friends with Dream since the womb,” Karl states, remembering what Dream had said that first time on the field. He points out the one with them on the swing. Sapnap exhales and smiles.

“I really have, haven’t I?” He realizes, setting down the frame in his hands, “How long have you and George and Niki been friends for?”

Karl thinks for a moment, “I’ve known Niki since kindergarten, but I met George a little over a year ago when he moved from the UK.” It’s hard to believe that he’d only been friends with George for such little time; he feels like he’s known him for a lifetime. And with Niki, he can’t believe how the years have flown by. He considers both to have his heart in terms of friendship.

“I figured he hasn’t been here long. He still has the accent,” Sapnap notes. George did indeed still have that thick British accent. It stuck out like a sore thumb.

They continue looking at the photos, the two having gone quiet.

Karl figures that he could ask about the other photo, wanting to know who the other boy was. It wasn’t that he was jealous or anything - though it was rather odd that he didn’t know about the boy at all, having lived here all his life - but he just wanted to know who he was and why he hadn’t seen him around.

“Who’s that?” Karl asks, pointing to the boy in the beanie. Sapnap looks over down the shelf, his smile faltering just enough for Karl to notice the shift in tone.

“That’s Alex,” He says dully, monotonous in his response. Karl can definitely tell there was something there. Sapnap looks away at the photo and at Karl, “an old friend,” he adds.

He didn’t say anything more to it, having effectively shut down any other questions or thoughts Karl had on the image at hand.

Karl’s never felt more of a shift in his life.

The air had grown thinner, though the tension otherwise. A topic left to no good, a name drenched in complexity and doubt. It lingers in the air, heavy and solemn; a mournful wake not to be disturbed, but was, yet ignored in its presence.

In reality, the moment had passed by quickly, a short-lived silence settling between the two. To Karl, it felt like a lifetime.

It’s taboo, almost, and Karl could not be more hesitant to move, let alone breathe.

“It’s uh,” Karl starts, breaking eye contact, clearing his throat “it’s getting late, don’t you think?”

Sapnap blinks a few times, inhales, and exhales a small grin, “You’re right.” His demeanor switches like a lit spark in a curtain draped sky. Just like that, the last moment is forgotten. It almost gives Karl whiplash.

He crosses over to his closet, pulling a blanket from the top shelf. Karl glances at the photo one last time for the night.

*Alex.*

He leaves it at that. If Sapnap wanted to speak more on it, then Karl would lend him the ears to listen. Until then, Karl sits in a suppressed wonder; a desire later left in shadows, one doused in mystery. He looks away from the photo, the image reaching its own hands out to him too dauntingly.

Karl's met with a soft smile, one that reels him back to the saccharine demeanor of the boy he knew. He understood that some things were just better left alone.

"Take the bed for the night," Sapnap tells Karl, cocking his head slightly towards the bed.

"And you? Where will you sleep?" Karl asks, taking a few steps forward. The boy steps to the side, revealing a makeshift bed, one composed of a folded blanket and throw pillow. It's neat, much like the rest of the room, and if Karl didn't know any better, then he'd consider the cot to be rather comforting.

But Karl did know better, and to allow him to sleep on the floor was not in mind.

He shakes his head, "I can't let you sleep on the floor, Sapnap," he firmly states, head held high, "you'll get stiff and tense and that's the last thing you need with that bruise on your face."

Karl's only met with the stubbornness he grew to be familiar with, "It'll straighten out my back if anything. If it's my bed that discomforts you, then I'll let you know that I've washed my sheets yesterday and have yet to sleep in them."

It wasn't the bed that bothered him, it was the fact that the boy wouldn't be in it with him. He only shakes his head, opening his mouth to dispute the prior statement.

"I know you enough that if we don't stop our argument now, then we won't be getting any sleep," Sapnap takes a dangerous step closer to Karl, reaching out pick off a small piece of lint on his shoulder, "And I also know that as much as I'd love to spend the night messing around, I have a feeling you're a grumpy one in the mornings."

He was right about that. Karl tended to be more irritated than ever when he didn't get enough sleep. Karl would wake the next morning upset and slightly vexed; it was just in his human nature, and not necessarily targeted at anyone.

Karl only huffs, turning away, knowing that he had taken the loss on this one, "Fine. Don't complain to me when you've got a crick in your neck."

The boy chuckles, cracking his neck in return, "I promise I won't, even if I do."

The two each get into their respective areas of rest; Karl, the comfort of a bed, and Sapnap, the firmness of the floor.

Karl takes his knee to the mattress, already sinking into the memory-foam composition. It hugs at his knee, and then the next, welcoming him into a state of relaxation. He reluctantly pulls the covers up, sliding into them, descending deeper into the mattress. The sheets alone at his waist now felt like what Sapnap's hugs felt like; but not quite just the same, lacking the repetitive tracing of shapes and foreign letters into his skin.

With that, Sapnap pulls the string to his lamp, cutting off the artificial streams of light. Only stripes of moonlight cast onto the floor in front of Karl, barely giving off a glow that of the lamp.

Karl shifts in the bed, opting to his side rather than straight on his back. He faces the direction Sapnap was, but the bed was high enough to render the boy hidden, almost like he wasn't there at all.

As much as he tried to, Karl couldn't shake off the event prior to their presumed sleep.

It was so quick, and so drastic at that, the mood of the room taking a steep fall from how lighthearted it had been. Karl must've struck a nerve mentioning that specific photo, and part of him wishes he had never brought it up, but the other part does.

He had yet to truly dig deep into Sapnap. For as touchy and comforting he was, he wasn't necessarily open. He was closed off, much like a thick forest behind a meadow he grew before it.

That wasn't a bad thing, no, Karl could never criticize him for keeping to himself, but Karl wanted to know more. He barely really knew the boy other than the fact that he was friends with Dream, he went to parties every now and then, and that he played sports growing up. That, and the fact that he struggled in Chemistry.

But in terms of knowing Karl? Sapnap knew so much, having picked him apart enough to know a good chunk of who he was.

Sapnap knew Karl well enough to guess that he was a cranky waker if his sleep was cut short. Granted, it was a well-rounded guess, but it was one that Karl couldn't make for himself to the other; so it was a one-up regardless of how simplistic the hypothesis rendered.

Karl was never the one to be exposed, - to be vulnerable - but Sapnap had managed to catch him at the right times. At first, it terrified him, and the countless nights of staring at his ceiling, begging silently to no one in particular for answers, proved it. Karl was never the one to want the attention, though, things have changed a bit. He's more open, more... willing to take risks. The Karl a month ago would've never guessed an outcome like now.

Karl had yet to do the same for Sapnap. He hasn't cracked the surface of the boy. Karl knows *too little* for Sapnap to know *so much*. Though, tonight, that photo revealed a wound. At least, it revealed a scar, one made by something tragic- something laced with either malice or regret; Karl guesses, at least.

It leaves him tossing and turning in his spot, the thoughts of how much Sapnap knew him and Karl otherwise never leaving his mind. Even if they bicker about something as silly as where to sleep, Karl would rather bicker than to be left alone with his thoughts like this, especially in an environment so foreign.

The sheets that were once welcoming now felt too loose, as though he really were out in the open; out on display, for all those who walk by to pick at. It makes him feel icky, goosebumps prickling his skin.

Karl curls up into himself, attempting to hide himself away from the thoughts that prod at his brain.

Perhaps that was the reason why Sapnap was rather closed off. Was it with Alex that caused him to be this way? Or was it by nature, that he was always allowing others to speak first, leaving him to listen and observe?

What if it was Alex? It couldn't have been - there'd be no point to keep photographic evidence of

his existence.

Was there even a problem that could be caused by the mystery boy? No- Karl shouldn't deem it a *problem*. Sapnap was *never* a problem. Why did he think that?

It leaves Karl frustrated, not wanting to solve a mystery that really wasn't even there.

He realizes that he wasn't going to be able to sleep regardless of whether or not he scolded himself for coming to such a conclusion; or lack of one thereof. Karl needs something to take his mind off of it all, and as much as he could just read something on his phone, he'll suck himself into a spiraling hole of articles on ScienceDirect that'll last till the beeps of a six AM alarm.

So, hesitantly, he calls out for the boy on the floor.

“Sapnap?” he whispers, hoping that the boy wasn't already asleep.

He hears some stirring, but it isn't long until he gets a response, “Yeah?”

Karl gulps, realizing how silly it was of what he was about to ask of him. He shakes his head, silently cursing himself for possibly awaking the one below him for no reason now.

“Never- Nevermind, sorry,” he weakly apologizes, wincing as the words fall out. God, it was embarrassing.

“Are you sure?” He hears more shuffling, “What's wrong?”

Karl bites his lip, “Nothing, it's nothing. Go back to bed, I'm sorry for waking you up.”

Sapnap sits up, the top of his head curving against the flat of the bed. Karl can point out the figure, his eyes having gone adjusted to the darkness.

“You didn't wake me up,” there's a crack, like Sapnap was twisting his back, “Now, tell me what's wrong. You wouldn't have whispered my name for nothing.”

There's a pause.

As much as Karl wishes he could sink further into the bed so that it consumes him entirely enough to disappear, he can't, now putting him in a position where he *had* to tell the boy what was wrong; or at least, part of it all, not wanting to directly bring up what happened earlier.

“Can you- Can you come up here?” Karl shakily whispers, “I can't... I can't sleep and-”

Immediately, he hears Sapnap get up on his feet, crawling into the space next to him. Karl had taken the center of the bed, so he scoots down to ensure Sapnap had plenty of room.

The mattress dips in his wake, and the silhouette of his body remains in its place. “Is this okay?” Sapnap asks, the distance between them only about a foot and a half.

Karl wants to come closer. He wants to be distracted by the stupid theories he's made in his head about the boy who laid right beside him. They make him feel guilty for trying to pry (even if it was all in his head). Sapnap did so much to make sure Karl felt comfortable, and all Karl wants to do is provide the same.

With that, he knows that Sapnap won't come to him unless he asks. It was the small price he had to pay when it came to him; though, it was a price worth paying any time, appreciating his patience and kindness for days on end.

“Is it okay if we...” he loses the word for a moment, “if you- like, I don’t know,” Karl’s awful at articulating exactly what he wants.

“Hold me?” Karl finishes.

The boy on the other side of the bed lets out a chuckle, “Are you asking if we can *cuddle*?”

Karl’s thankful that there was barely any light in the room, his cheeks without a doubt going red and hot. He nods bashfully, and Sapnap scoots over to the center of the bed.

Karl molds into him. Sapnap’s arm is underneath his neck, reaching his back, while Karl’s head is tucked away into his chest.

“Are you comfortable?” Sapnap whispers, eliciting a hum and nod from Karl.

Karl inhales, Sapnap’s scent entering his system. It’s sweet, and sort of musky, but in a good way. “I just... new environment, you know?” He mumbles.

“And my arms aren’t?” Sapnap retaliates playfully. He began to do that one thing, where he draws shapes with his finger into Karl’s skin. He feels light touches on his back.

Karl sighs, “Do you ever stop flirting?” He meant it lightheartedly.

The boy shakes his head, “Nope,” he pops the ‘p’, “ but I think you knew that.”

Karl sighs into his chest, “Perhaps.” A moment flickers by, “Thank you,” he whispers.

“For?” Sapnap switches from shapes to squiggles, effectively rendering Karl to relax more.

“For... *this*. For doing this for me,” he inhaled, “you really didn’t have to.”

Karl is drawn further into the boy, the embrace having gotten a tad bit tighter, but welcoming. “Anytime,” Sapnap says softly, slowing down his drawing on his back.

With that, Karl yawns, feeling sleep creep on him now.

It was insane how quickly his anxiety melted away. The thoughts that were previously wrapped around his skull disintegrated, leaving his presence with Sapnap’s protection. He felt safe, and less ashamed for thinking about it in the first place.

Sapnap’s other hand slithers into his own, fingers interlocking. The boy squeezes and Karl does the same; a nonverbal way of communicating that it was alright.

He doesn’t know when exactly it happened, but eventually, sleep consumed Karl, drawing him into a thick slumber in the other’s arms.

For once in his life, he willingly surrendered himself to vulnerability; his safety in the hands of a boy who he barely knew.

It’s... peaceful.

And nothing short of it.

What a time.

I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter; part of me wants to rewrite it to be a little more developed in the future, but it was starting to frustrate me and that's no way to go about this! If I've learned anything from this piece and this community, it's that you gotta do what's best for you - and just putting this out here like this seemed the best option.

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter!

# The Asiago

## Chapter Notes

TW // None

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Karl's the first to wake up in the morning.

He found himself roughly in the same position he remembered falling asleep in, only this time closer and more tangled up.

His legs were interlocked with Sapnap's, his body nearly draped over the boy beneath him. Karl's head rested on Sapnap's shoulder, face nuzzled into his neck when he first cracked his eyes open.

Sapnap's arm remained around him, a still hand laying flat against his back. They were relatively under the covers, only Sapnap's left leg behind exposed along with his torso. Their hands were still intertwined as they were earlier, surprisingly.

Karl lies there for a moment, basking in the feeling of being held by the boy. It was comforting and soothing; something he wasn't really used to first thing in the morning.

He wiggles his fingers a bit, noting the relaxed grip Sapnap had on his hand. Karl could pull away if he wanted to, but he doesn't. He keeps their hands connected, granted, connected loosely, but connected nonetheless. It gives him this warm feeling, one that tends to come around when he's with Sapnap; and how ironic is it that he's never felt it with George or Niki or any other human.

He doesn't want to dwell on... on well, whatever speculation he had to pine himself against and ping pong theories with. So he focuses on what was in front of him instead.

Karl observes Sapnap's face. Not a single crease laid upon his delicate skin, so deep in slumber that he was as relaxed as can be. It makes him look so utterly young, and as he should, considering he was a teenager.

Yet, it fascinates Karl. The state of serenity seemed so beautiful, and Sapnap embodied it as such. He looked rather alluring, and Karl's almost jealous for not being doused too in such a state; *almost*.

He maps out the faint freckles that lie on his nose, connecting them in his mind to create a new constellation. They were all so small and barely visible, that to the naked eye, much further from where he was now — which was mere inches away — there'd be no recollection of it at all. They adorn his skin like fine jewels on a gold rimmed crown; already making something so glorious even more so.

The bruise says otherwise though. Karl frowns when he sees it again, suddenly remembering how concern ravished his mind and body.

The color began to transition from that angry red to a blue-ish purple, staining his skin like the glass one may see in cathedrals. If it were a painting, Karl could've deemed to be an interesting choice, though on Sapnap, it only makes his heart ache.

Thankfully, though, the swelling had died down; his face was molding nearly symmetrical to the other side. At least, Sapnap had that going for him.

Karl has to refrain from pushing down on a lifted corner of the bandaid so as not to wake the giant holding him. He wants him to have as much sleep as he can, seeing as today would probably yield another long practice, to which he would be required to participate in whether or not he had that bruise. Karl believes it to be cruel, though, no coach would side with him. It's just the way things were.

Instead, he lays there, comfortable in their embrace, and continues discovering the little things to Sapnap's face that he hadn't noticed before. He notes things such as hidden birthmarks at his ear and small white scars on his jaw and how long his eyelashes are.

They were things he never had the chance to observe, never being so close for long enough to recognize. It's calming, in a way.

It's *really* calming. To lie there in the stillness of it all, to live right then and there. Karl finds tranquillity to a case gnawing at the back of his mind; one that makes him question what he was doing there in the first place.

He appreciates the moment, and perhaps he's being dramatic, or plain old poetic in nature, but for a split second, he sees it.

Karl sees what he believes to be what it was like to be so drawn to someone, that it makes him ache to part.

There was something about the domesticity and beauty of it all that leads Karl to believe that perhaps... Perhaps Sapnap *could* be more than a friend. Something that would terrify Karl now seemed harmless.

It's short lived as the other's face twitches, signalling his upcoming wake. This catches Karl by surprise, having gotten so invested in his dawn discoveries that he doesn't have the chance to close his eyes before the other one opens his.

"Good morning," the boy mumbles, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips, "what are you staring at?"

Karl scrunches his nose, having been caught. "Nothing," he lies quietly, averting his eyes to the ceiling instead.

"Mhm," the other hums, "sure." He yawns before catching Karl's eyes again.

There's the faintest bit of light leaking into the room, catching Sapnap's eyes just right to reveal the green irises. They looked so magical up close, brown speckles lining the pupil.

They lie there for a few more minutes. Sapnap adjusts to the early morning in silence, slowly blinking as he looks about the room. Karl allows him to fully wake, assessing a quick memory quiz on what he found on Sapnap's face. It's a fun game in his mind.

Another inhale later, and Karl feels the other squeeze his hand. "Although I'd rather we stay here for the rest of the morning," he begins, using his thumb to trace circles into the other's, "I suppose we have to get up now, don't we?"

For someone who never dares to skip school, no matter how many times George asks him too, part of Karl would gladly submit to a few more hours of shuteye with the boy. He contemplates it for a

moment, squeezing back. “Five more minutes? Please?” He whispers, wanting to relish in their embrace for just a little while longer.

The other chuckles, drawing him closer into his chest, “*Only* five more minutes.”

So they lie there for five minutes, all of which Karl spends inhaling the boy’s scent and basking in their warm hold under welcoming covers. He probably should have been the one to draw away sooner, to slowly inch his way out of their entanglement. But he wasn’t.

He closes his eyes, letting his muscles release any tension that remains. An exhale later, and he swears he could fall asleep again.

And he could have, if it weren’t for the boy reminding him not to.

“Hey, don’t fall asleep on me now, sweetpea,” he warns playfully, “I’d hate for you to be late.”

Karl groans. Must they *have to* go?

He feels the other’s chest rise and fall with his chuckling. “If it makes you feel any better, I don’t want to go either,” Sapnap adds, bringing his free hand to Karl’s hair, twirling a piece, “But we *do* have a chemistry test today.”

God, he had forgotten there was a test today. In his eventful day prior, the test had floated away; the thought being too far out of reach for Karl to really care, which was new.

It takes Karl another moment before nodding, pulling his head away from the boy’s chest. He guesses it’s truly time to part; he believes the time away would do him some good to his morning delusions. At least, part of him wants to believe that, but somewhere inside that brain of his, he knows it was no delusion.

It all had come across so naturally; the way they molded into each other throughout the night, Sapnap’s strong, though gentle, arms drawing him into his chest comfortably. He felt safe, oddly enough. Karl doesn’t know how he could feel so... protected; but protected from what threat?

He’s pulled away from any more thoughts to it when he feels stirring besides him. Karl lets go of the other’s hand, giving both of them the freedom to pull from the sheets. The sudden contact with the cool air makes him wince, his arms prickling at the intrusion.

“Sorry,” Sapnap apologizes, “my heater decides to take the morning off even when it’s the middle of October.” Karl gives a weak smile, using his hands to warm his arms up by rubbing them.

“It’s alright. It wakes you up, at least,” he responds. Such was true, as Karl was now more motivated than ever to slip on his sweater for the day.

He swings out of bed, landing on his two feet. Thankfully, Sapnap’s floors were made of carpet rather than hardwood or tile. He walks over to his bag, crouching down to pick up the clothes he packed for the day.

The two of them part ways to get ready. Sapnap gives him the bathroom first to brush his teeth and change. Karl enters in thankful for the offer, quickly getting ready so the other could as well.

When the boy comes out, he too is dressed. He wears a maroon sweatshirt with a black jacket on top. It truly was getting cold, and Karl can’t blame him for layering up. Sapnap opted for black joggers too, looking as comfortable as possible.

“I don’t know about you but,” Sapnap says, grabbing his phone from his nightstand, “I could really use a good breakfast before heading to class.”

Karl perks up at this. Usually, he would snatch a granola bar from his pantry and eat it on his way to school. For as much as a cook he was, there simply wasn’t enough time or willpower in the mornings to make himself a good breakfast, so he opted for a better lunch instead.

Karl nods, “What did you have in mind?” He’s on board for breakfast, especially for one before his test (a test he knew he was going to do good on regardless of whether or not he had a good breakfast).

“How does Eret’s Cafe sound?” Sapnap asks, grabbing his two bags, “They have good bagels.”

Karl can feel his mouth water already. He’s never had bagels at Eret’s, but he has most definitely swung by to snatch a scone on his way home from time to time. There’s no doubt in his mind that Eret’s bagels were just as good; the bread being freshly made every single morning, and Karl knows this because he’s seen it.

“Yes,” Karl moans, “I love Eret’s Cafe.” It was one place that also impressed him, being the novice chef he was. The cafe was rather authentic, and Karl could definitely get behind authenticity in a town full of chain restaurants.

“Good,” Sapnap swings his backpack over one shoulder, “because I would’ve taken you anyways,” he teases.

Karl makes sure to grab all his items before stepping out the door. He pets Cash a good day too, effectively getting him all riled up and excited only to find out he wasn’t coming along for the ride. It makes Karl feel awful, but Sapnap assures him that he was always like that in the mornings, even after knowing Sapnap to leave time after time for school.

The two loop to the back seat of the car, setting their bags down on the seats before traveling up to the front; Sapnap in the driver’s seat and Karl in the passenger’s.

Sapnap backs out of the driveway, putting his arm behind Karl’s seat to look behind him. He knows that when there was no back camera, most people did such, but seeing Sapnap do it? Karl could feel the butterflies wiggle in their cocoons once more.

When he backs all the way out, he cuts the wheel and makes his way out of his neighborhood. It were the smallest things that Karl noticed.

They go a few minutes in silence, only the radio filling up the air. It was a nice silence though, one that wasn’t awkward or thick; they preferred each other’s presence to express anything on their minds.

Eventually, a certain song comes on the radio, one that Karl could recognize as ‘country’. It wasn’t exactly his forte, though, he doesn’t mind. He certainly doesn’t mind it when he hears Sapnap sing along.

“You may think that I’m talkin’ foolish,” Sapnap quietly sings, a southern twang lacing his voice, “you’ve heard that I’m wild and free.”

Karl listens, the country side of the boy peeking ever so slightly. He’s never heard the other remotely sing, whether he tried to or not.

“You may wonder how I can promise you now,” he taps the steering wheel in beat, “this love that I

feel for you always will be.”

Karl can’t help but giggle.

“What?” Sapnap asks, stopping to glance at Karl.

“Nothing,” Karl lies, smiling. “Keep going, cowboy,” he teases.

The other one rolls his eyes playfully, “How can you not sing along? It’s Randy Travis.”

Karl doesn’t say anything. He simply shrugs his shoulders and shakes his head, still grinning. It was adorable, in a way.

“You look like you have no clue who I’m talking about,” Sapnap claims, sighing dramatically. “I literally grew up on him and his movies, you know. My pops introduced him to me,” he pauses, thinking to himself, “maybe it’s just a Texas thing.”

Karl raises an eyebrow, “I thought you were from here.” He had no clue he had Texas roots.

He nods, “I am. My pop’s from Texas and my mom’s from here. I spent most summers with my pops growing up, and we used to play all sorts of country on the ranch.” Karl only listens, allowing Sapnap to ramble a bit. “He knew how to play this on the guitar- he’s the one who really got me into music, you know?”

“Really?” Karl asks, looking at him.

“Yeah, really,” Sapnap glances at him and then focuses on the road again, “Though, I ended up playing the violin; I think I was just a little too ambitious.”

Karl lets out a giggle, “That makes two of us then.” The other smiles.

“I suppose.”

They turn into the cafe, the ride having been rather short from Sapnap’s house. The two exit the car, not being able to finish the rest of the song. Karl will have to ask for the name of it so he could hear it in its entirety uninterrupted on his own time.

Upon opening the door to the cafe, the tempting aroma of baked goods waltz around them, luring the two further in. It’s nostalgic, reminding Karl of his own kitchen when he was younger, specifically when he made bread with his mother.

The two of them walk up to the counter, two others before them ordering. Karl browses up at the menu, noting the many different types of bagels they had to offer. Who knew they had such a selection?

“What’re you thinking?” Sapnap asks, nudging Karl.

Karl furrows his brows, “I don’t know, actually. What do you usually get?” He figures that Sapnap surely had recommendations, seeing as he was the one to bring them there to begin with.

“The ‘Everything Bagel’ with scallion cream cheese. It’s pretty good,” he points at the menu, “though, if you want something salty, the asiago is always great. Or the french toast bagel, if you want something sweet.”

He doesn’t know exactly what he wants just yet. Karl feels his stomach growl, signalling that he was indeed hungry. He can never eat just when he wakes up, often feeling too sick to stomach

anything down, so the late-ish breakfast will do some good.

“The asiago sounds good, I think,” he decides.

“And to drink?” Sapnap asks. Karl knows what he wants then, settling for some honey-lemon tea, while Sapnap opts for some coffee.

He lets Sapnap order for the both of them. The gentleman at the register punches in what the two wanted. While he’s doing so, Karl reaches into his pocket and pulls out his wallet. Before he can take anything out, Sapnap shakes his head.

“No, no, I got it. My treat,” he says, putting in his card before Karl can even respond. He was good at that, catching Karl off guard and ‘treating’ him; he had done this before at Olive Garden. Karl would be lying if he said it didn’t irritate him just the slightest to be pampered like this; he was always one to set the balance (until it was George, who was definitely indebted to Karl in many ways, but he was the only exception).

The two obtain what they order and steal a booth seat at a window.

“When will you let me pay?” Karl asks, putting the napkins he snatched down onto the table.

Sapnap opens up a small sugar packet and stirs it into his coffee, “Next time, I promise.” He winks at him, taking a sip from the paper cup.

Karl rolls his eyes, doing the same, but from the mug that held his tea, “You said that last time.”

“Did I?” Sapnap asks, pursing his lips, “Oh well, we’ll just have to go out more often, now won’t we?”

He’d think that eventually he’d get used to Sapnap’s smooth, flirtatious comments, but alas, Karl stands corrected. He feels his face go hot, and he wishes he could play it off on his tea.

“I guess so,” Karl sets his mug down. He picks up his bagel, twisting it open to apply some butter between the two halves.

When he finishes, he takes a bite.

It’s the way the warm, dense bread infiltrates his taste buds with the cheese on it that just *dissolves* at first touch. If Karl didn’t know any better, he’d believe he was in a sort of ‘Bagel Heaven’. It was just *that* good.

He closes his eyes, relishing in the savoury goodness. The butter was just enough to bring out the prominent flavor on the gluten product; not diluting it or distracting from it in any way, shape, or form. It was simply a bagel, but a damn good bagel at that.

Sapnap seems to recognize the bliss Karl was in, snickering at his relaxed state. It’s what makes Karl’s eyes open again, and regain consciousness in the real world. Perhaps he was just incredibly hungry that he transcended for a moment.

“Good, right?” Sapnap asks, taking a bite from his own.

Karl nods, wiping his mouth with a napkin, “God, yes. Thank you so much.”

Sapnap exhales in a sort of relief, “Of course. I don’t disappoint, do I?”

Karl shakes his head in reply and takes a small sip from his tea. It was still rather hot, but he didn’t

mind. He prefers it to be hot rather than lukewarm, or worse, cold.

“How’s yours?” Karl asks, curious to know if Sapnap had a similar experience. The flavors had to be drastically different, his bagel having no evidence of a salty exterior like the asiago did, but instead was lathered in that scallion cream cheese he mentioned earlier.

“Superb, as always,” he hands the other half out to Karl, “try some.”

Karl shakes his head, “No, no, it’s okay. I have my own.”

Sapnap rolls his eyes, “I don’t mind. I haven’t bitten into it or anything, so you won’t get cooties.”

He can’t help but laugh at the word. *Cooties*. Karl hasn’t heard anyone say that word in a long time.

“Fine,” he agrees, seeing as he knows Sapnap wouldn’t relent. That was another thing Karl knew, that Sapnap was as stubborn as he was. He figures that giving in to a bite on a bagel would harness the least harm to his pride in having his way (but in good manner, of course).

He has nearly the same experience as before, though, he knows what an ‘Everything Bagel’ usually contains, it being fairly close to how common a plain bagel was. However, it still knocks him off his feet.

The scallion cream cheese absolutely makes the meal. It’s the slightly peppery onion flavour that dresses the bagel, showcasing how *delicious* ‘Everything Bagels’ truly were. Call him a nerd, but he could discuss flavor any day of the week at any time. It was Karl’s guilty pleasure.

He hands the half back to Sapnap, nodding his head. “That was, dare I say, absolutely scrumptious,” Karl jokes, putting on a fake accent similar to George’s.

Sapnap chuckles, retrieving it and setting it down on his napkin. “Bloody ace, innit?” Sapnap tries, but it falls flat, and it’s definitely an accent mangled in all the wrong ways. It sets Karl off into a laughing fit.

Sapnap joins along, laughing about, certainly causing a scene now in the semi-empty diner. “Was it *that* bad?” He asks in between laughter.

Karl nods, setting any food related item down so as not to choke or spill anything. “That was *horrendous*, Sapnap.”

George would certainly be offended (playfully, of course) at the attempt Sapnap made to mimic him. It truly was downright *awful*.

“Oh come on!” Sapnap exclaims, exhaling a wheeze, “You’re best friends with a Brit, so you have an upper hand.”

“Okay, but you act like you’ve never seen a British TV show or anything,” Karl points out, “Like, have you ever heard Gordon Ramsey speak?”

Sapnap raises both of his eyebrows, “Of course I’ve heard Gordon Ramsey speak, but I don’t watch Hell’s Kitchen every day!”

Karl nearly chokes on his own spit, “Neither do I, you nimrod!”

They both fall into the same giggles and laughter again. Karl’s gasping for air at the end of it, the

whole scene of it all making him so utterly delusional. Sapnap's face was most definitely red from hysterically howling about.

When they finally do die down, Karl feels his chest ache in how hard he laughed. It was a good ache, though, one he would kill to feel again with the boy.

They're taking deep breaths, calming down from what just happened. Karl can't help but let out a giggle when he takes another bite of his bagel; he was so easily reminded of the poor attempt at the accent.

"You're an idiot," Sapnap claims playfully, sipping his coffee.

Karl rolls his eyes, "Whatever. At least I don't sound like *that* when doing a British accent."

Sapnap only scoffs and goes back to eating his bagel. He smiles at Karl anyway to let him know he wasn't truly mad. Karl does the same to signal that he was just messing around.

They get to a good bit through their meals before they talk about anything else, simply enjoying their food after such an event.

Karl figures that as much as Sapnap learned about him during their last outing, he could learn more about Sapnap now.

"You should tell me more about Texas," Karl somewhat asks, "if there is anything more to it."

" 'If there is anything more to it,'" Sapnap repeats, he leans forward on the table, "there is *definitely* more to *Texas*."

From there, Karl leans back and listens. Talking about Texas came easy for the boy, as he quickly rambled off about how wonderful the state was.

Aside from learning about how Texas fields compared to none other, he hears a lot about his 'pops'. Many things that Sapnap covers were tied back to his pops.

He tells a story about how at one point, back in middle school, he had gone blonde. Except, 'going blonde' had meant having frosted tips. Essentially, Sapnap had the same brown hair, but the tips of his hair went a yellow-ish color, similar to how Guy Fieri or Justin Timberlake had back in the early 2000's.

Apparently, his pops claimed it to be in style when he met his mother, so, Sapnap being the absolute naive tween he was, willingly agreed to get frosted tips. He found it to look awfully nice too, until coming back home to La'Mahnburgh only to be bullied into covering them up with a hat.

That's one thing Karl learns about him, is how influential his pops was in his life. He hears a good chunk about the man, hearing how he's taken the longest drives just to see Sapnap here, and about how he'd make the meanest barbecue La'Mahnburgh ever saw.

And Karl listens. He listens so intently, he thinks he's lost himself in the boy's voice.

It was just... nice. It was nice to know more. It makes Karl feel less anxious, less nervous about putting himself out there. Learning about the boy leads Karl to believe the trust is imminent, gathering more than just memories.

He peers into a window of his life, a small one, but just enough to see where all the kindness came from. Karl gets a glimpse of the patience and hospitality origins; and it makes his heart full.

Of course, there isn't enough time in a single breakfast to fully unravel the boy, but it's enough to present a start. It's a start to something Karl knows will grow.

They're down to the last few bites to their bagels when Sapnap wraps up his last story for the morning.

"Dream still gets frustrated whenever pops calls, even after all these years, Dream can't understand him," Sapnap shakes his head with a loose smile, "I'd doubt you'd understand him either, but I would like to say y'all would get along."

"Oh really?" Karl asks, sipping the remnants of his tea.

The boy nods, "Definitely. He's a cook too! You guys could, I don't know, whip up something good."

Karl giggles at the remark. He imagines meeting his Pops. He imagined how lively he was and how many stories he himself could tell.

"I believe you," Karl responds. He checks his watch. There was about twenty minutes left to first period. It barely crossed Karl's mind that he'd be late to school, and quite honestly, he doesn't care.

At that moment, there's no regret in showing up late when he's had probably one of the best morning's he's had in a very long time. Karl doesn't think he could've traded this time in Eret's Cafe with anything else, let alone the same old boring Literature class that will still be there the next morning. Though, they'd have to leave soon if Karl wants to go to Chemistry to take that blasted test.

"Time to go, huh?" Sapnap asks, sighing. "C'mon, we should get going."

Much to Karl's dismay, they leave, throwing up their bagel wrappers and setting aside his mug on the table. Sapnap opens the door for Karl, and he thanks him quietly before going off into the car.

The ride to the school is short-lived, only being about five-ish minutes away from the cafe. In this time, he checks his phone, his mother having sent him a simple text that she was doing fine. He makes sure to send her a quick 'I love you', since he hasn't already.

He closes out of the messages app and decides to view the weather for the rest of the week. It had grown really cold, and Karl wants to know whether it'd get any colder than it already was. He notes that it was going to be as cold as it was today for the rest of the week, but what catches Karl's eye is the 95% chance of thunderstorms for today.

"Hey," Karl says, gaining Sapnap's attention, "apparently it's supposed to thunderstorm today."

Sapnap furrows his eyebrows, "Huh. Well, maybe practice could be cancelled if there is one."

Karl nods, putting his phone up. He figures now would be a good time to thank him, having broken the small silence they had.

"Thank you, by the way, for breakfast - and well, letting me spend the night," Karl expresses his gratitude as they pull into campus.

Sapnap glances at him, "Totally- no yeah, anytime. It was really nice, seriously."

Sapnap parks close to the back entrance. They had arrived late, as expected, and the front entrance parking lot was certainly full of student cars. The back entrance wasn't too far from Karl's locker

anyways. Before they go to their lockers though, they stop by the front desk to get late passes, claiming that their car had ‘broken down’ (Sapnap’s idea, not Karl’s; though it had gotten them both through with excused late passes).

They part ways for a moment afterwards, each allowing the other to gather all the items they needed before going off to the very little that was left to first period. Sapnap’s locker was just down the hall, about midway between where George’s locker was and Karl’s own. It was good to know where Sapnap’s locker was.

Karl grabs his books and whatnot before meeting Sapnap at his locker. Ever since that one time, Sapnap has walked Karl to his first period every morning, the two finding something to chat about in the short distance there.

Sapnap retrieves his belongings and shuts his locker, giving his attention to Karl and walking with him. The hall was rather empty, everyone being in class. It was different compared to their other mornings together.

“You should sleep over more often,” Sapnap suggests as they make their way down, “I could get used to morning bagels.”

Karl giggles, “Oh yeah?” He thinks for a moment, “I suppose. But next time, I pay.”

Sapnap rolls his eyes, “Ok fine, sure,” he says playfully.

They reach Karl’s Literature class. There was about ten-ish minutes left to first period. He’s about to wave the boy goodbye when Sapnap says something.

“Good luck today, not that you’ll need it, but still,” Sapnap digresses, “good luck, alright?”

Karl smiles bashfully, holding his books to his chest, “Thank you.”

Sapnap gives him a small wave before going off down the hall, leaving Karl to go into class by himself. He waits a moment, looking at the door and then back at the one going down the hall.

He doesn’t know exactly what possesses him to do it, but he does, and he finds himself shouting ‘wait!’

His legs have a mind of their own, jogging to Sapnap, who turns around confused. He’s got this perplexed look on his face, curious as to why he was called to halt.

It’s a split second decision, though it feels like there was no decision to make. It was simply just something he did without a thought. An action driven by ambition.

Karl stands on the tips of his toes, delivering a small kiss on the boy’s cheek, whispering to his ear, “Good luck too,” before scurrying off to his class.

He doesn’t bother turning back, though, he catches a small glimpse of Sapnap standing in the hall, one hand on his cheek.

Again, Karl doesn’t know exactly what pushed him to do that. It was the first kiss that he really did on his own accord; not that the kiss on the bandaid or, the more well-known, bench kiss wasn’t, but this one had been *truly* on his own accord.

He only registers what he’s done when he’s sat in class.

Karl gave his late pass to his teacher, who then gave him the work for the day. It would soon be the work he'd have to complete for homework tonight.

He takes his seat next to Niki. She nudges him slightly, cocking her head towards her paper. She had written him a little note in the corner.

*Where were u?*

Karl writes back.

*I'll explain during lunch*

He's about to get somewhat started on his work when Niki nudges him again.

*Were u w/ Sapnap?*

Karl looks at it and contemplates answering. The room was silent, and quite frankly, he didn't want to make a scene again like they had done last time when he had news to share with that particular boy. He decides not to answer it.

Though, to not answer it only did the opposite. Niki only smirks and shakes her head playfully, erasing the miniature conversation they had on the corner of her work.

Karl can feel his cheeks heat up. He shakes it off, returning back to his work.

Dare he say he had a spectacular morning.

## Chapter End Notes

It's these chapters that really make this slow burn worth it, huh?

If you're not convinced yet, you very well will be by the next chapter, chapter twenty. Can you believe it? We're almost twenty chapters in and they're still not dating? I'm terrible, I know /lh - though, if you've made it this far by now, you must certainly trust that all this will be for something, no?

Also, had to change the username. Mutuals were close to finding it, and I'm a sucker for anonymity. I hope you guys understand.

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter!

# Living Deliberately

## Chapter Notes

TW // None

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So what I’m hearing is that you skipped school for Sapnap, but not for me?” George is blinking at Karl in disbelief, “I’m genuinely hurt.” He’s got one hand over his heart for emphasis.

The three of them sat in their usual booth for lunch. Karl had just finished recalling the events of the last twenty four hours, all of which George has seemed to grasp only the latter part of.

Niki raises an eyebrow at him, “*That’s* what you got from this? Not the fact that he patched Sapnap up, had dinner with him, slept over his house in *his* bed, and then went to Eret’s Cafe for bagels?” She takes a bite of her salad.

It seems to click in George’s head then on all that Karl had just told them. He scratches his head. “Oh. That too- since when were you two so scandalous?”

Karl’s jaw drops at the word. He didn’t think of them as such. “Okay, first of all, we aren’t *scandalous*,” he pauses to think, “it was a spur-of-the-moment type of ordeal.” Karl shifts in his seat.

“Right,” Niki notes, taking a sip of her lemonade, “because you’re the type of person to *not* plan things ahead.”

Karl purses his lips. He *was* the type of person to plan things ahead; it was his trademark, if anything. He tries to defend himself nonetheless.

“Well- no- I just... it’s,” Karl stutters, attempting to find the right words. “It’s easier to *not* plan with him, you know? Like, everything ends up all fine, so I don’t feel the need to really plan.”

They tend to have a routine now, walking in the morning and studying on the same days each week. It worked for the both of them, more so for Sapnap when it came to football practice after school. Everything else fell in between just perfectly, and Karl doesn’t find any of it really bothersome. In fact, it brings a little spice to his cumbersome days.

“Sure,” Niki replies, not seeming convinced just yet. He doesn’t blame her, it wasn’t a Karl-like thing to do.

Karl sighs. He stirs his leftovers in his container with his fork. He wasn’t exactly hungry, considering that he had eaten just an hour and half ago.

“Have you guys talked about dating yet?” Niki asks, focused on Karl.

It was a tricky question.

No, they haven’t talked about *that* yet, at least, they haven’t explicitly mentioned or discussed anything of the sorts. Karl would be lying if he claimed that he himself hadn’t, though.

Dating as a whole seems to be considered the societal standard to proclaiming loyalty to one another. It's adorned with calling each other names other than their own; Sapnap being a contender of such, frequently tagging the ends of his sentences with *honey* or *sweetpea*. The word brings forth admiration and confidence in the hush-hush of trust and belief of safe-keeping of all that is sacred to the other.

In a way, Karl deems it to be the gateway to longevity, one that should be chosen carefully with plenty of thought and consideration of what has come and what was to come. Which is why it's taken as long as it has to make it to this point in time, where Karl has just dipped his toes in "romantic waters".

Waking up in the boy's arms wrapped about Karl's own body, or to share meals in the comfort of the other's presence just scratches the surface, as so it seems. Though, they were moments in which Karl felt like he was floating, all serene and at such an ease that he forgets all of his worries. Sapnap was good at that, masquerading Karl's doubts for a while, at least, until he had to leave, to which Karl felt his chest pang with the slightest bit of need for him to stay.

While it wasn't much, Karl believes it to be so much. It was so much more than he could ever imagine, which is also another reason as to postponing the talk on "dating". He's made it a point to dissect each discovery with the other, as Thoreau noted in his work, *Walden* .

"I'll take that as a no," Niki assumes, setting aside her fork.

Karl blinks. He forgot he was even asked a question. "Yeah- no, not yet, at least," he clarifies.

George takes a bite from his sandwich, "Well, let us know when you do. Operation: *Karl Gets A Bitch* is still in session." His mouth is full when he speaks, to which Niki scrunches her nose in disgust.

Karl exhales in laughter. Sometimes it slips his mind that they whipped up that notion at the beginning of all of this. It's hard to believe it was only weeks ago.

With that the bell rings. Lunch was always too short it seems, but thankfully, Karl managed to fit all he needed to say into one sitting. The three of them pick up all of their belongings before waving each other off to their next classes.

The rest of the day is oddly quick. Perhaps it was because Karl actually set his mind to his work instead of daydreaming about his day with Sapnap, which he can neither confirm nor deny is what he did during his test in Chemistry (his score may or may not reflect on that).

He goes home in Niki's car, seeing as Sapnap dropped him off this morning. His house was on the way to hers, so it was convenient for the both of them (even if it wasn't, Niki had such a big heart that she'd drop him off anyways, regardless of how far it was from her destination).

Their talk is minimal, only noting how the rest of their day. George was always the one who had something to say, to which Niki would argue against or respond accordingly. Karl tended to listen instead, always running through what he was to do once he got home.

Niki offers to give him her work from their Literature class today, but Karl politely brushes her off, wanting to do the work himself. He finds it as the 'punishment' for skipping class. Besides, he always did his own work; integrity was a good slice of what made Karl, Karl.

Halfway through their way home, the sky begins to weep. Thick droplets of rain hit hard against

Niki's windshield, the storm Karl noted earlier that morning arriving. The clouds had ambushed the remainder of what could be deemed as clarity, now dark and gloomy.

Karl hopes that Sapnap wasn't going to play in this weather. The boy didn't need another bruise from slipping in mud or whatnot. Could turf turn into mud? He doesn't care; Karl only wants him to be safe. Niki assures him so, claiming that no couch would allow any student to play in the middle of what was to come and what was here. He believes her.

Karl thanks her before slipping out of her car when she pulls into his driveway. The rain was coming down awfully hard now, and so quickly at that, signalling that something strong was whirling by. The distance between the car and the door to the warmth of his house isn't too far, and he manages to get in without being too drenched.

Once inside, he kicks off his shoes and wipes the droplets of rain that remained on his face. Karl notes his mother's work jacket hanging on the coat rack. She must've returned during the day, though the absence of her car argues otherwise.

He assumes that she went off to go grocery shopping. They were beginning to run low on fresh goods, so if she hasn't gone off yet, he supposes he'll have to. He doesn't mind doing it himself, considering that the two equally do the cooking in the house depending on the other's schedule. It was just that the roads were going to get too slick to drive on, and Karl would rather not get in an accident on his search for asparagus and tomatoes.

Karl decided in the car that he was going to get a quick start to his homework, so he travels upstairs to his bedroom. It was the way he had left it, tidy for what was supposed to be him and Sapnap's study session the day prior.

He takes off his damp sweater, opting for a dry one instead. It was better to be safe than sorry in terms of getting sick; his mother having driven into his head at a young age that wearing wet clothes in the cold results in getting sick, even though she herself knows that to be a myth (ironic for being a nurse, Karl would later note).

Karl takes a seat at his desk, zipping open his bag at his legs to pick out the homework he had to do. His eyes fall on that Literature assignment, deciding to get that out of the way before he could do anything else.

He picks it up, setting it down on his desk and flipping the first page of the packet to the questions regarding the reading on the front. It was an excerpt from famous author, Ernest Hemingway, who had some tie to Scott Fitzgerald, the author of *The Great Gatsby*. Karl snatches his pencil and uses it to guide himself through the first question.

No matter how many times he re-read the passage on the front, highlighting, underlining, and annotating the information, Karl couldn't answer the first question.

It wasn't that it was hard, no, nothing ever really came *hard* for him in that class. It was that he couldn't focus, his mind always finding its way back to that particular boy from that morning.

And it was killing him.

He thought of the faint freckles dusting Sapnap's nose and cheeks, along with his tousled hair and sleepy eyes. Karl felt the imprint of Sapnap's hand in his, weighing it down as if it still remained whenever he wrote on the packet. Karl could see his smile in his mind, always being so wide and bright, effectively distracting Karl from comparing Ernest Hemingway's style to Scott Fitzgerald's, both of which had *drastically* different styles that even a fifth grader could distinguish

from.

Sapnap was all that was in his mind. That tends to be the case lately, the boy always weaving his way into Karl's focus, driving him away from his studies, leading him to reminisce about something that happened not too long ago; in this case, something only a handful of hours or so ago.

He groans, throwing his pencil onto his desk pathetically as he spun around in his chair. There was no way he was going to be able to finish this packet if he couldn't focus. And it was a shame too, something that was deemed easy was now strangely difficult, and taunts Karl for not being able to put it in its place.

"God," he mumbles to himself, rubbing his temples. He feels like he should be able to knead the thoughts out of his head, but alas, no matter how many times he tries, he fails miserably.

Oftentimes, his nights were of this sort. It was the only time Karl's guard was down long enough to be infiltrated by the Trojan horse that was Sapnap. Though, the horse attacks early, and at such an inconvenience.

He's been given too much of a treat that morning and night, and his brain seems to reopen those files at any point of the day now, effectively causing Karl to slip into planning the next time he'd see Sapnap. It's addicting, he knows.

The silver lining arrives when he hears the door downstairs open, the house alarm beeping ever so faintly against Karl's bedroom walls. He takes this chance to leave his wonders for a later time, opting to go downstairs and meet presumably his mother.

She's hauling grocery bags in, her hair glistening in the cloud's ambush. Upon sight, Karl's first instinct is to take some from her hands, and so he does. She says a quick 'thank you' before following him into the kitchen, settling the bags onto the counter.

His mother cocks her head towards the door, signalling that there were more in the car. He follows her, quickly snatching the remainder of the bags and closing the roof of the trunk.

Once back inside, he gets started on unbagging and placing the items in their respective areas. Karl likes seeing what was in stock.

"Thank you, dear," his mother says, taking off her jacket, "those should last for two weeks or so."

Karl nods, opening the fridge and pulling the bottom drawer out to set tomatoes he had on hand in. When he turns around, he finds his mom setting aside the pantry items, lining up cans of peaches and green beans onto a shelf.

"So, how was work?" Karl asks. He hadn't seen her in nearly two days.

She groans from the pantry closet. "Awful. Had to cover for two other nurses, you know."

He scrunches his nose. Her shifts were long enough, let alone to cover two others. No wonder she had been gone for so long.

"Though," she grabs more cans, "I'm off for the rest of today and tomorrow, which is nice, considering that the storm is gonna bring in a lot of people."

Karl hums in response. That was true, considering that the last time his mother worked in something like this, they kept her there for what felt like days (and *was* days).

“Anyways, how was your sleepover? George and Niki alright?” His mother slides the rest of the cans into the bottom levels before meeting Karl back into the center of the kitchen. He’s almost done putting away all that needed to be refrigerated. She sits on one of the bar stools at the counter.

He bites his lip. Karl forgets he didn’t tell his mom whose house exactly he slept over. He wasn’t going to lie to her, no, he could never, but he did feel a certain nervousness bubble under his skin.

“Well,” he starts out, turning his back away from her, now looking at the inside of his fridge. He pretends to organize the middle level, even though he knows it’s as tidy as can be. “I didn’t sleep over George or Niki’s,” he says in a small voice.

“I slept over Sapnap’s,” he confesses, a bit too anxious to turn around just yet.

There’s a beat.

“Oh,” she says before clearing her throat, “well, how was Sapnap’s?”

He inhales, turning around. “It was... good,” the words weigh heavily on his tongue. He doesn’t know how to exactly go about it all.

“Good, good,” she repeats, nodding. Karl can tell that she’s holding back from asking more questions.

“We went out to breakfast this morning too, kinda lost track of the time and-”

“And you were late,” she interrupts. Karl’s eyes go wide at this, not realizing that she had known. His mother pulls out her phone from her pocket, “School called and left a message about you having an absence in first period.”

His jaw drops slightly. Karl forgets the school was so adamant on attendance that they sent immediate phone calls to parents on any absence, and most teachers took attendance in the beginning of class. He’s not one to be late nor absent.

“I figured you just woke up late or something, and they called again saying that you were excused anyways, so I left it alone,” she puts her phone back into her pocket. “You know, it was so much easier skipping school when I was in high school. They never bothered calling home.”

Karl blinks. He thought that she would be a little bit more upset about him missing first period like that.

“You’re not mad?” Karl asks, confused.

She snorts, “*Mad?* Karl, baby,” his mother looks at him sympathetically, “sometimes I *wish* you skipped school. As long as you stay on top of your studies, I don’t mind you taking a day off.”

It takes him by surprise. His mother was never really hard on him when it came to his grades; majority of the time, Karl was the one to be on top of himself. While she wasn’t hovering over him like that, she was an advocate for his education nonetheless, so he figured that doing something like this could warrant a red flag of sorts.

“Oh- well, uh,” Karl inhales, “we just went out to Eret’s Cafe for bagels.” It comes out small and meek.

His mother’s ears perk up at this. She teases him, “A little date, I see.”

Karl's eyes go wide. "What? No, it wasn't- it wasn't a *date*," he stutters over his words, "it was just breakfast, that's it." He feels his cheeks grow hot, clearly flustered at her comment. It hadn't been a *date*.

She looks at him from the tops of her eyelids, her eyebrows slightly raised. "Mhm, okay. Well, tell me about it. I want to know more about your 'breakfast'."

Karl tells her what he told the other two earlier that day. He mentions the car ride, and the Randy Travis song, to which she too raises a brow at. He exclaims that he didn't have a clue who he was either. They decided that it had been a Texas thing.

He retells the breakfast portion of their morning; how delicious the asiago was as well as how he had doubled over due to Sapnap's horrific attempt at a British accent. Karl skims over the stories Sapnap told him about his dad.

"I was wondering where those manners came from," his mother notes, running her fingers through her hair as she listens to Karl, "he's too nice to be from here."

It wasn't that the people here were mean, but Karl understood what she meant. Sapnap *was* too nice to be from here, always using 'please' and 'thank you', and never being in a rush to get anywhere. The pick-up truck should've given it away, if not his gentleness with Karl.

"I kind of agree with you on that," Karl says with a smile. He grabs a clementine from the now-stocked fruit bowl, "he's a gentleman at heart."

"Sure sounds like it," she chuckles, reaching her hand out for one of the slices. He gives her half and begins popping the rest into his mouth.

She pulls her phone out again, this time just scrolling through it as she eats her half of the clementine.

A beat passes, the white noise of the rain around them settling.

There's something about the environment that makes Karl want to ask for her opinion on it all. He feels his thoughts slowly emerge from the depths below the thick fog of distraction, and before he spirals, he decides that perhaps his mother has some worthy insight.

"Hey mom?"

His mother peeks up from her phone, "Yes?"

"How..." he pauses for a second, thinking about how he wants to word what he was going to ask, "How do you know when you want to take it to the next level?"

She furrows her brows, setting her phone face down onto the counter. "What do you mean? Like, with Sapnap?"

He nods, shyly eating another clementine piece. Karl thinks his mom might just have the answer to his question.

She scrunches her nose in thought. "I don't think you really *know*, dear. It just comes to you."

Well, perhaps she didn't.

"But like, *when* does it come to you? What does it feel like?" Karl asks, setting the peels of the

fruit down onto the granite countertops.

His mother purses her lips. “It hits everyone differently. You just feel comfortable enough with the person to know if you’re ready to move forwards- and they’ll know too. Maybe they know before you do, and if that’s the case, they’ll wait until you’re ready.”

The gears in his head turn at the latter part of what she had to say. Karl has a feeling Sapnap has probably known- or at least has acted confident enough to make it seem like he already knows. Either way, if Karl knows anything at all, he knows that Sapnap has been waiting.

He’s been patient with Karl, moving at no other pace than what Karl set it at. If it meant waiting weeks to hold his hand, then it meant just that: waiting weeks to hold his hand. And he did it without complaint, no matter what he was waiting for, Sapnap never complained or urged him to think otherwise.

It had always been at Karl’s rate. Even when Karl wanted to accelerate faster than he knew was best for himself, Sapnap stopped him, easing down on the breaks for Karl to realize that he wasn’t exactly ready yet; ie, the movie night.

All in all, Sapnap was patient, and that was hard to come across nowadays.

“That... that makes sense,” Karl agrees, running a hand through his hair. “Sapnap does that a lot; waiting.”

“Does he now?” She asks.

Karl nods, “Yeah. He’s really good at it though. He just kind of follows my lead, I guess.”

She smiles at him. Karl wraps around the counter to meet her, taking the stool next to her. “I just don’t want him to wait *too* long.”

His mother grabs his hand, squeezing it slightly, “If he *really* likes you, then he’ll wait for however long it takes. Let it be days, months, years- doesn’t matter,” she sends a pulse, “he’ll wait because he knows that it’ll all be worth it in the end.”

Karl leans his head against her shoulder, sighing, “Will it, though?”

She inhales, doing the same, resting her’s on his head, “Oh Karl, *definitely*. You’re one in a million, kid. Anyone who is willing to wait for you is one who knows that in the end, they’ll be so glad to have waited.”

Karl takes a few deep breaths, simply sitting there, leaning against his mother. He fiddles with the gold band on her ring finger, remembering the stories she told him about his own father and how *he* waited for her. There weren’t many things his mother told him about his late father, but the very little she had, that was one of them.

His father waited for his mother for years- from the beginning of high school until she graduated from college. She didn’t want to let a man get in the way of what she wanted, so she vowed to not get married until she graduated with her nursing degree. And she told him that; she even went as far as to explicitly tell him that she wasn’t going to be in a relationship until then too.

In a way, she tested him. They remained good friends throughout school, getting really close to the point where his mother nearly dropped that ideal; but she didn’t. She was adamant on getting her degree, which is probably where Karl’s idea of her getting angry over him missing school stemmed from.

Nonetheless, he remembers that the minute after she tossed her graduation cap into the hair, she found his father next to her, in his own cap and gown, asking if now was the time.

And it was.

From that moment on, they dated for exactly a year before he popped the question to her on their one year anniversary.

Now, Karl didn't think he'd go to that extreme, but he understands why she had done it. He can only assume his father was one of the very few who could do such a thing, but Karl can see now that Sapnap qualified as a contestant to the *very* few.

"Sapnap's a really, *really* good guy, mom," he starts out, his throat feeling all too scratchy, "I know he'll wait- he has, and... and I really like him."

She hums, "If you *really* like him, then what's stopping you from taking it to the 'next level'?"

It stumps Karl for a moment. Sure, doubt and worry tended to halt him, but what was he so scared of? That he'll be rejected? That Sapnap will make him do things he doesn't want to do? That it'll end horribly?

Karl can't pinpoint exactly what it was that stopped him.

Rejection didn't seem too much of an option when it was *Sapnap* who seemed to put the most interest into Karl. He had proven himself several times that he's not the type of guy to pressure Karl into doing things he wasn't ready for, as well. The boy asks every time if it's okay to touch his hand, for crying out loud.

In regards to the end... Karl knows that everything has one. If it were to end in flames, he knows that the part he'll cherish the most is his growth, doing things he's never done before. The experiences that he'll have to carry with him for the next one is what he considers to be the greatest takeaway, though, he'll have to cross that bridge when he gets to it. Speculation could very well be his downfall.

Perhaps the universe was nudging Karl today, edging him to a conclusion he feared not to be too far at the rate he was going at.

Several weeks ago, Karl remembers exactly what he told Sapnap in the cleared area in the trees. He can hear it, all that he and Sapnap said on that bench.

No matter how many times he tried to deny it, or make it sound different than it already was, Karl knew he liked Sapnap. He's known it for a while now, yet every time he returns to the thought, it's as though he didn't.

It's always a surprise- a spontaneous concept that just couldn't be true. Not yet, Karl would think, *not yet*.

He couldn't be moving so fast, not yet. He couldn't be falling head over heels, not yet. He couldn't be so drawn to the boy that he hates to let go, not yet.

Though, he can't help but wonder, when will it be *yet*?

When will the time come to accept the fact that yes, he likes Sapnap, and yes, he wants to go further; he's said it before to him, that he wanted to.

He really wants to.

Karl *wants* to meet him at the fence each Friday, congratulating him on another flawless win. He *wants* to ride home with him in that red pick-up truck, listening to the soft hum of a country twang to songs he's never heard before by artists he's never known to exist till then. He *wants* to wake up in the break of dawn, wrapped in sheets that weren't his own, and his body nestled in arms of another- one that promises to match his lead everytime.

He yearns for it, and maybe it took till now, eating clementines in his kitchen, under a roof pelted by the tears of a weeping sky, with his supportive mother, to know.

But he knows.

*He knows now.*

"Nothing," he whispers, answering her question.

With that, he picks up his head from her shoulder and disconnects their hands. He abruptly leaves his seat and snatches his keys and phone. His feet seem to have a mind of its own, propelling himself towards the front of the house. Heading towards the door, the footsteps of his mother follow, and she's at his side when he's shoving his feet into tied shoes.

"Uh, sweetie, what do you think you're doing?" She questions.

"Mom," he exhales, standing up and now looking down into her eyes, "I have to tell him."

She blinks, clearly puzzled by how sudden the decision was, "What? What are you talking about?" His mother shakes her head, "Sapnap?"

He clarifies, breath heavy, "Nothing is stopping me, because I really, *really* like him, mom."

"He's so patient, and so kind, and he makes me so happy-" Karl can feel himself start to spiral, "so incredibly happy. He knows exactly what to say to make me feel butterflies and to make me laugh and make me feel *good*, you know?"

"I have to do it now before I convince myself not to," he grabs onto her shoulders gently, "do you trust me?"

"Karl-"

"Answer the question, *do you trust me?*" He demands.

Karl's peering into her eyes as though they were windows to her thoughts. Her's flicker between both of his own, face tense from the spontaneity of Karl's gestures. He waits patiently, not breaking his gaze.

It's the one thing he needs from his mother to send him off. If there was anyone in this world that he cherished so dearly for eternity, it was her. He *needs* her approval.

"Yes."

He offers a small smile, whispering, "Then you have to let me do this."

She sighs and looks off to the side.

He knows that it's risky. The roads were probably too slick for him to go more than twenty down

his neighborhood, where any faster and there's no doubt he'll spin out with the turns of his street. The main roads were even more dangerous, as the possibility for oncoming traffic to wipe him out was heightened in this weather.

Though, it doesn't stop him. He knows in this moment that he needs to tell Sapnap in person how he feels. All he's waiting on now is permission from his mother, who stands before him clearly stressed and conflicted about him doing this.

A few seconds later, he's given the green light.

"Okay," she sighs, closing her eyes, "but you *have* to be safe. I swear to God, Karl, promise me I won't be paying another visit to the hospital today."

Karl nods, "I promise."

She sighs.

"Then go tell him."

Karl kisses her cheek before swinging the door open to winds threatening to slam him against the side of his own home. He steps out with no umbrella, no hoodie, nothing to protect him from the smothering hits of rain. Here went nothing.

Karl dashes down the pavement leading to his vehicle. He clicks his keys, quickly slipping into his car and shoving them into the ignition. Turning them, the car springs to life, and he finds himself backing out of his driveway.

His windshield wipers are fighting for their life as they toss the beads of rain to the side, giving Karl a window to look through to drive.

His fingers tap the window nervously, and his eyes scan the road even more so to ensure his safety. His foot is ever so present on the gas pedal, lightly pressing down to ensure he doesn't completely wipe out. Sapnap's house wasn't far from his, and even though he's only been there twice, he knows it like the back of his hand.

This was it, huh.

He was going to do it.

In the next five minutes, or even less than, Karl's going to be stripped down to the bone, vulnerable and exposed before someone he learned to trust, to adore and learn with. Karl's going to surrender a part of him he kept guarded with every inch in him, to someone who treats him preciously.

Karl's going to confess all that there was to confess- anything and everything that finds its way out of the confinements of his mind. The weight from his conscious would lift, escaping from it's tight bounds of insecurity and doubt.

Karl finds himself pulling up into Sapnap's driveway minutes later. He didn't bother to call or text if Sapnap was even home. By the looks of the red pickup truck next to him, and the lights bright on the front porch, he has a fair shot of catching him that moment.

One deep breath and he takes his keys out, shoving them into his pocket. He clicks his seatbelt, freeing himself from its grasp.

Now was the time.

Karl fumbles with the car door, shaky in opening it. Stepping out, he's met by the returning enemy of Mother Nature, immediately drenching himself in her wake. He runs over to the trail leading to Sapnap's home, sheltering himself.

He's shivering, realizing that in his rush to tell the boy how he felt, he didn't bother bringing a jacket or anything of the sort.

He hesitates.

The only thing that separates him and Sapnap now was the door.

This is what he wants, he's sure of it.

So he knocks.

The tension settles between him and the door. It's thick, nearly suffocating Karl in it's existence. His palms are damp from sweat, and his heartbeat travels through the artery in his neck, pounding ever so harshly in his ears. It's deafening, more deafening than the lightning dancing behind him.

He could turn around and run, run back to his car and pull away before Sapnap even reaches the handle. It would be like he was never there, as though some neighborhood kids were pulling a prank on the boy who opens the door to no one.

This was his last out.

But Karl doesn't take it.

Another beat later and the door opens.

“Karl?”

## Chapter End Notes

Apologies for that cliff hanger - it had to be done.

I cannot explain how many times I've rewritten this chapter. If you follow my twitter, you'll know I've been absolutely struggling with this one.

Nonetheless, it's been done, and now it's shared with you guys. I appreciate each and every one of you, and all I have to say is thank you for the 1000 kudos (and by the time I return back to this to post another chapter, the 25k reads!)

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter!

## Time.

### Chapter Notes

TW // None

Please read end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Confidence is much like courage.

The human body is susceptible to being afraid of the unknown, and the conquering of fear results in exhilaration. Relief is bestowed when the threat of what was to come diminishes, and thus the next time one is faced with the same, they are exhibited with a rather prepared exterior. Though, what separates the prior to the latter is the courage to take that first step in the dark - and with courage, comes confidence.

In this moment, Karl stands before something that he knows impacts his life regardless of the outcome. With discovery comes a sort of euphoria; in this case, Karl Jacobs walks away with newly found confidence to expose himself conspicuously, to display valiancy so that if he had to lose everything, he'd lose it on his own accord. Though, he only prays and wishes that were not the case.

Confidence, and courage alike, is deemed a trained behavior. While euphoria produces ecstasy in its purest nature, thus delivering said confidence and courage, euphoria alone is left with an expiration date. And as with all highs, either synthetic or otherwise, they must crash eventually.

Which is what happens to Karl Jacobs the moment the gateway to the unknown is swung open.

*“Karl?”*

All that had been rushing through his veins, the boiling self-assurance and bubbling belief in himself, simmers down immediately. Removed effectively, it leaves Karl twitching as though he were malfunctioning. If he were truly an electronic device, there'd be the “404” error page loading up right about now.

Last anyone checked, Karl was completely human.

He simply stares at the boy in front of him, who was dressed in the same maroon hoodie and black joggers as before; who was also peering back at him with rapid, blinking eyes like windshield wipers in a storm. Ironic that Karl stands in the pouring rain, drenched, cold, and shivering (when had he started shaking so badly?).

His jaw feels locked in place, nearly stitched closed even when it's quite clear it hadn't been minutes prior. The words that were on the very tip of his tongue have crawled back down his throat, hiding between his ribs.

“Karl? Are you okay?” Sapnap asks, stepping forward cautiously and slowly.

Still utterly paralyzed, Karl remains standing there like an absolute nimrod. He can tell that it's obviously concerning the other, but he can't move.

"Can I come inside?" He's mumbling, and the words felt all too loose coming out of his mouth. Karl should've known that the exterior he possessed seconds beforehand would quickly retreat, like waves drawn back in by the sea.

The boy before him nods quickly, stepping off to the side to let the other in. Karl manages to pick up his feet again, the still stance he took uncooperatively to his previous mindset took a step back. That was one thing he could be thankful for, the ability to not look like a complete idiot if he asked to come in and not move one bit.

Inside, it's nothing short of warm and welcoming. Clearly heated against nature's cold, ruthless wishes, the living room urges Karl to relax his otherwise stiff muscles. It's almost enough to leave Karl pliant; *almost*.

Sapnap swings in front of him to lead him to one of the couches. Karl takes the notion to sit down, wincing at how uncomfortable he was in his wet shirt. It clings to his back and shoulders, even the neckline sticking to his collarbones. It makes him feel uneasy in a contrasting environment.

"You look like you're freezing," Sapnap says, still not having sat down, "What were you thinking leaving the house without some sort of jacket?" He's not mean about it, only concerned. And Karl can't tell which would be worse; being mean or being so worried.

"I wasn't," Karl answers truthfully. He grips his hands around his arms while looking down on the floor. He's embarrassed for not thinking like that. Karl was one to plan, not to be so abrasive and impulsive. It wasn't him, and he knows it.

When he looks back up, he sees that Sapnap's taken off his hoodie. It sits in his hand as he reaches out to give it to him. Karl shakes his head.

"I don't want you getting sick, and I would offer another one if they weren't all in the wash," He says firmly, but withdraws his hand when Karl continues to refuse it. Karl knows better than to succumb to the other's clothing like that; he had done it with the sweater and it left him dumbfounded for days, and as much as he wants to relish in the warmth and scent of the other, he knows that there won't be any confession tonight if he's distracted by it.

Sapnap sighs, "Then a blanket, at the very least." Karl opens his mouth to oppose him, but Sapnap beats him to it. "No arguing on this one, the last thing we need is for you to be sick before midterms."

With that, Sapnap disappears behind him to presumably grab a blanket. Most of the time, Karl would feel somewhat special to receive something from the boy, the only exceptions would be when he paid for Karl. This time, though, Karl can't help but feel guilty.

Not a minute later and Sapnap's drawing a blanket over Karl's (slightly, now) shivering body. He hated how Sapnap knew him all too well like that.

The other wraps around back to where he stood beforehand, only this time actually taking a seat. They're a couch apart, much to Karl's dismay. Perhaps it was best though, considering how Karl had yet to explain his entrance.

"Can I ask you why you're here? I assume it wasn't just to say hi," Sapnap asks, folding his hands into his lap. He looks like he's trying to maintain some sort of composure, though Karl wonders

why he would have to try. It was Karl who needed to stand his ground, not the other way around.

“Right,” Karl says slowly, feeling his jaw let up. The tension between the two of them was unlike no other. He bites the inside of his cheek before continuing, “I needed to talk to you.”

“About?” Sapnap’s leg jolts slightly, “You could’ve texted or called, I wasn’t expecting to see you on the verge of hypothermia at my doorstep at six in the evening.” His words make Karl wince. He knows it comes from a place of concern, though he can’t help but feel just a bit terrible at how it all played out.

He keeps going, leg now bouncing. “Do you know how dangerous it is to drive in weather like this?” Sapnap shakes his head slightly, clearly distressed. “You could’ve crashed! God- you could’ve spun out and landed in a ditch, Karl.”

“I know, I’m sorry,” Karl apologizes softly. He was sorry; he should’ve *at least* sent a text saying he was coming over. It was irresponsible- out of his own moral character and compass that it makes him feel sick to his stomach.

“No, I-” Sapnap takes a deep breath, “*I’m* sorry, that came off aggressive.” He let his shoulders droop down in relaxation. “There was an accident on Coulderain Street on my way back from school, and that was *before* the rain really started to hit.”

Coulderrain Street was the street Karl took to get to Sapnap’s house. He could only imagine how worried Sapnap must’ve been now knowing that a wreck happened hours beforehand. Karl had heard none of that prior to Sapnap telling him so.

“If I had known that you were in need of telling me something, on a day like this, I would’ve come to you before you came to me,” Sapnap’s got kind eyes, ones expressing compassion. Karl had no clue Sapnap would react in such a way, let alone offer to go to him first.

“I drove slow, y’know, I got the whole speel from my mother,” Karl shifts in seat, embarrassed, “I wouldn’t be reckless on the road.”

Sapnap gives him a sympathetic smile, “I know you’d drive safe, but others won’t. I’m glad that you’re here though, seriously.” He moves couches, deciding to sit closer to Karl. It was less tense this way, Karl thought, though, he would be proven otherwise.

“Now what is it that has you driving through hell to tell me?”

Karl gulps. A large part of him wants to back out, almost laugh it off and tell some silly white lie. It would make his grand entrance feel like it was worth nothing, but at least he wouldn’t have to deal with the repercussions from confessing the truth as to why he came all this way.

It had been so much easier those moments before the car ride -- and even during -- to run through everything he wanted to say. Now that he was in the position to do so, it’s like it all had disappeared, effectively leaving Karl unprepared for a speech for someone he cared so deeply about.

Fear is much like anticipation.

Even when one decides that they are to dwell into the dark depths of all that is sacred, it is still deliberately snipping the tightrope they balance on to discover said depths. The courage to do so remains mighty, though it floats, and doesn’t sink like one does below. Yet, fear does the same,

leaving itself dangling on the cut rope rather than following.

What does travel is anticipation. It remains tethered to one's body, and lingers in the back of one's mind as a reminder that the unknown is still... scary, no matter the adrenaline pumping otherwise. Anticipation is masked by what one thinks is fear, though in reality, it is the feeling of knowing something will happen. A consequence is evident, and the reaction is unpredictable.

So, while Karl tiptoes his way across the beam, attempting to avoid the pestering confession at his hands, there's nowhere to escape but down. The tightrope is infinite, as he's realized. So he jumps.

“Sapnap,” Karl forces himself to look into his eyes, “you are so... great to me- to others, to anyone you meet, really.”

Sapnap only looks back. It makes it all ten times harder when he has the audacity not to interrupt him. Karl believes it to be the one time he wishes Sapnap was just the slightest bit rude just so he could get out of this awkward situation.

Though, he perseveres.

“You’re just so generous like that, you know? I thought you were just being nice to me when you gave me that sweater,” Karl laughs softly to himself, breaking the stare between the two. “I didn’t think you were just being nice when you let me keep it.”

His mind drifts off to that moment in the parking lot, holding the bundle of fabric in one hand, yelling across several cars only to hear that he was to keep it.

“I never knew why you let me keep it, afterall, we barely knew each other,” Karl smoothes out the blanket on him so it covers his thighs more. “It was stupid, but it felt like you gave it to me for a reason. I thought you wanted to see me in it one more time, so I wore it to the next game and-”

Karl stops himself, realizing that he was rambling a bit. “Sorry, what I mean is that, the sweater- the sweater made me feel so much and I didn’t know why.” He looks up from his lap to see Sapnap staring at him. He looks like he wants to say something- to elaborate on everything, but he doesn’t. Sapnap lets Karl speak.

“What made it even more confusing was when we talked about Gatsby that one night. I didn’t know your name till then, but making the connection between you and me and Nick and Gatsby- it.... I don’t know, I thought for sure I was going insane,” Karl let out a breathy laugh, “I thought that there was no way you correlated the two characters to us; it was just too... too coincidental.”

He remembers how that night made him realize that he needed to tell Niki and George about Sapnap. The following day he did, and thus sprung the operation that jump started this search; a search for how Karl *truly* felt about Sapnap.

He bites his lip, “But then you had to go and kiss me on that bench and make me think that maybe these stupid feelings were being reciprocated. That it was either you could hear my thoughts or that you felt the same, somehow. I think the latter made the most sense.” Karl feels his heart beat against his chest, and he wonders if Sapnap could hear it too. Perhaps he had some supernatural powers and Karl was wrong.

“I was scared,” Karl admits shyly, “I was scared of how I felt and what it all meant, but you- you made me not so scared.” His voice cracks, and Karl can tell he was starting to get emotional.

“I didn’t want to be stranded, you know? Like, for you to bring me to this point of vulnerability and leave me behind.” His throat starts to close up, “I didn’t want to get *hurt*.”

He’s never admitted that before. Not to his mother, not to his friends, not to anyone. Karl didn’t even know that was the reason till it came out of his mouth.

“I’m a very logistical person, okay? I plan things out, I write my life’s sequence on a stupid planner so that I have the most control over *my* life- but *you*? *You* come in and make me do things that I don’t put a second thought towards; and *I don’t know why I let you*.”

“I realized that you make me into a *better person*,” Karl swallows, “one that isn’t so afraid and is so trusting. *You* make me feel so good, and I hate that empty feeling I get whenever you leave. I just want to be around you *because* you make me feel so good.”

His hands shake not because he’s cold, but because he’s got everything that he’s kept hidden flowing out of him relentlessly. There’s no stopping or going back now.

“So- So I wanted to let you know that- that, I’m ready. Sapnap, I want to be your *boyfriend*.”

It’s quiet.

Not silent, no, the rain fills in what would be silent. It’s quiet, deliberate, and slow.

Dare Karl say that time has stopped; with nothing mattering except for them, two otherwise meaningless boys in the grand scheme of things in this world.

Anticipation bubbles against the thin walls of his nerves.

“Karl,” Sapnap starts, his voice sounding raspy and dry, “I like you, a lot, okay?”

He nods slowly. It was nice to hear again even if Karl already knew so.

“I know you never let me compliment you, but Karl, I think you’re one of the best people to have ever walked this Earth,” he says with a small smile. “And I would go one, but I fear you might melt.”

Karl could attest to that. He was shifting in his seat shyly, refusing to make eye contact with the other. Compliments were never his forte.

“But, Karl, I need to make sure that you understand what you’re saying,” Sapnap peers at him cautiously, almost hesitating in breathing. “Because this... this isn’t like you, you know?”

His words sting, and Karl can feel something weighing down on his shoulders. There’s a deflating feeling in Karl’s chest, and despair and doubt fill in his lungs. “I know what I’m talking about, Sapnap- I mean it. I want to be your boyfriend.” He thinks that saying it again might convince the other, though, he wonders *why* he had to convince Sapnap. Karl thought he’d be ecstatic to move forward finally.

Sapnap purses his lips, a small frown tugging at one of the corners. “We should wait, maybe clear our heads before we come to a decision,” he states, looking away, “that way we know for sure.”

Karl can feel his heart leap to his throat, “What are you talking about?” This wasn’t how it was supposed to go down- Sapnap was supposed to hug him and twirl him about while Karl giggles and

tells him to put him down. He was supposed to have the brightest grin on his face.

“Karl,” Sapnap says softly. The name that once sounded so good and not as mundane coming out of his mouth now sounded twisted and sour. It makes Karl’s nails dig into his palms.

“I don’t think you’re ready for that yet.”

Anger is much like repression.

Except it’s not.

No, anger is not like repression- anger is despicable and undesiring. It isn’t poetic, it’s not a concept that has a saccharine dipped ending. Anger is utterly raw and cruel, and repression is the prerequisite.

Repression is the pot that has been boiling, with everything Karl has kept to himself for weeks now. It’s all the damned feelings and thoughts that wrapped Karl’s head and heart; the same ones that only come out at night to pester him and reevaluate every move and word the other has made or said.

Confidence, courage, fear, and anticipation alike were all that he needed to blow off that top, to *finally* expose every secret he had. And he did that. He was dressed in vulnerability and drenched in trust for the other not to shatter him like a poor ceramic cup left out on the corner of a high counter.

“No.”

Sapnap blinks, body tensing slightly. “No?”

“No,” Karl spits out firmly.

He did *not* spend the last three hours decoding all that he felt with himself *and* his mother to be turned away because *Sapnap* thought he wasn’t ready. Karl did *not* travel in the pouring rain in the middle of a fucking thunderstorm to have his own feelings decided for him.

He can’t control what comes next.

“Who are *you* to say that *I’m* not ready?” He’s got a bite on him, and it tastes acidic and bitter. “Sapnap, all due respect, but you have *no right* to tell me if I’m ready or not.”

Karl stands up, a slight animosity crawling under his skin as he rips off the blanket from his lap. It lays helplessly on the couch, part of it draped towards the rug beneath his feet. “That’s not fair. You can’t let me go off on a tangent about how much I *want* you only to *push* me away like that.”

Sapnap mirrors him, bringing himself up onto his feet. He’s a good foot taller than Karl, which should have been more intimidating if he didn’t know that the other wouldn’t dare lay a hand on him. “I’m not pushing you away I’m-”

“No, no, no! You’re pushing me away! You’re deciding for me when I’ve already poured out everything- I’ve practically vomited all my feelings and-”

“How else am I supposed to react? You show up unannounced and tell me all of this when you’re

always so closed off.” Sapnap argues back.

Karl’s not one to lose his temper; he’s never been the one to lose it. He likes to look at things from different angles before coming to a decision, though, this time, he can’t. How could he when he’s admitted *everything* only to have it nearly disregarded.

Karl digs his nails into his palm harder, “*I’m* the one who’s *closed off*?” He scoffs, “Says the person who has barely told me *anything*! I didn’t even know you had Texas roots till this morning.”

“Okay then- then if you barely know me, then how do you know you want to be with me?” Sapnap talks with his hands. They flicker about, each sharp move reflecting his tone.

They were a few feet apart, both facing each other as they disputed. Karl didn’t think he’d be having his first argument with Sapnap the day he confessed he wanted to date him.

“Were you not listening to my speech?” Karl’s eyes are starting to sting again, much like they did towards the end of his confession, “*I just* told you how I knew.”

“And I just want you to think about it some more. I want you to know for sure that you want to be with me,” Sapnap exasperates.

Karl feels like he could scream. “*I have* been thinking about it! I’ve been thinking about it for so long that I’m so *tired* of thinking about it.” His throat tightens. “Do you not believe me or something? Like when you didn’t believe me when I said that I liked you back on the bench?”

Sapnap sighs angrily, “Of course I believe you!” It comes out strained, almost like he’s trying not to yell at Karl. Their voices seem to boom in Sapnap’s living room.

“Then believe me when I say that I’m ready,” Karl spits out, his voice cracking at the latter half. He feels the tears well up in his eyes, “God, Sapnap, I’m certain I’m ready. I just want you.”

He doesn’t want to beg, but it feels like he is. He’s trying to hold on so desperately, and part of him believes that he would fall to his knees if it meant being heard and understood. It’s pathetic, he knows.

“I know you do... I just...” Sapnap swallows, voice returning back to its normal level, and less frustrated, “We need time to think.”

Karl whips his head away the second he feels the first tear exit its hold in his eyes. He didn’t want to see Sapnap see him like this, not when they were arguing especially.

It’s hurtful, everything that Sapnap said. It felt like a slap in the face, except, Karl would appreciate it more if he had just so he could dislike him more in this moment. He’s certain that a slap in the face would hurt less than how he was being treated right now.

He doesn’t want to question if he was ready or not; no, Karl *knew* he was ready. He doesn’t want to be convinced otherwise. It was a shame, though, that the minute Karl knows he’s ready, he’s shot down.

It’s rejection, in a way.

Karl knows that sometimes it’s best to be patient, much like how Sapnap was during this whole process. Though, Karl doesn’t understand what he has to do to prove that he is ready. Wasn’t his word enough?

“Karl?” Sapnap says softly, taking a step towards the boy, “Please... it’s not because I don’t like you- I really, *really*, like you, it’s just,”

“It’s that we need time, okay? We need to make sure that this is what we want.”

We.

“I’ve made up my mind,” Karl glances up at Sapnap, now looking at him through blurry eyes, “now you need to make up yours.”

With that he turns curtly, heading straight for the door. He doesn’t hear Sapnap’s pleas for him to come back inside, at least, he doesn’t listen to them. The rain was coming down even harder than it had before, pelting Karl harshly as he made it to his car.

Getting in, he has no other thought than to just leave. He needs to get away- far away from Sapnap. It’s selfish, he knows, but in this moment, he needs to protect himself more than anything. He was silly to think that he could display himself like this and not get burned.

Karl hopes this doesn’t last long; he wishes he could turn back time to this morning, where he was encased in arms so tightly and so warm that everything else had melted away. He wants to go back to before he made up his mind.

He knows that once he’s cooled off and has had time to think about all that he and Sapnap have said, then maybe he could understand where the other was coming from. Karl’s had too many arguments with George to know that being stubborn like this and standing his ground without as much peeking at the other options is ignorant and only leads to more conflict.

Right now, though, all he can do is feel. He doesn’t want to *think* anymore.

Heartbreak is much like... *nothing*.

It’s a pain that compares to nothing else, where its stages range from wrath to despair to numbness- it’s unique.

Karl can’t put a definition to it, mostly because he’s never felt heartbreak. He thinks he’s feeling it, at least part of it. He doesn’t know, and he doesn’t want to know.

He doesn’t want to have his heart broken before he even knew it was devoted to someone like that.

“It isn’t,” Karl whispers to himself as he drives down the slick road.

“*It can’t be.*”

## Chapter End Notes

I know.

Everything happens for a reason, and I can only ask that you ensure you’ve read this chapter very carefully to fully understand why it came to this. And to read the tags, if you haven’t already.

This isn't the end, but I do want to say that updates may be slower than usual. Constantly writing for weeks on end has taken a toll on me, and while I will admit that my interest in mcyts has began to diminish, I will say that this story *will* be finished one way or another.

My heart goes out to all of you who read this. You guys have really helped me grow as a writer and I can only give out a huge thank you. Thank you for being here and supporting me and this story. I say it a lot because I mean it a lot.

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter.

## The Aftermath

### Chapter Notes

TW // Angst / Sadness; feelings in general.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's all a blur.

At least, it was all a blur to Karl.

Driving home, stumbling through the front door, crying into his mother's arms, and then being coddled on the couch as he fell asleep from utter exhaustion seemed like a blur.

The night just hadn't felt real- nothing had felt real. It just *hurt*, and it was a type of hurt that Karl had no clue how to medicate. All he could do was just cry and sob as horrid tremors wracked his body, writhing in his mother's arms as he had no clue why it was *so* painful.

It just was.

Karl wakes up on the couch the next morning, the clock on the wall ticking just a little after eight when his eyes flutter open. The blinds had been drawn closed, and no lamp or house light was on in the entirety of the ground floor. He still wore the same clothes as the night before, only now dry and slightly stiffer than it had been before.

He lies still. It's not a moment before memories of the night prior attempt to infiltrate his mind, to which he can't bear to run through again; at least, not when he had just woken up from what felt like a nightmare in and of itself.

So he forces himself to move, to do *something* just so he didn't have to crash like he did prior to his slumber. Karl sits up, placing his hands on his lower back and arching, cracks and pops derive from his stretched spine. It felt nice, having felt stiff all over.

He twists to the left and then to the right before using his fist to prop under his jaw to get his neck. It was relieving, in a way.

Karl braces himself before pressing his socked feet onto the carpet. Slowly, he brings himself up onto his legs, knees slightly buckling. He still felt weak as ever as he braced himself for potential fall. His body was too sore to move so quickly.

One more glance at the clock and he notes that he's over an hour late for school. Though, that didn't matter to Karl. There's no way he can bother going to school when he's certain that if he sees him, he's unsure of how he'll react.

Karl *knows* that the way he had acted was less than ideal in terms of remaining calm and collected; in fact, many could argue he had been otherwise, having lost all sense of what was 'calm and collected'.

Though, could they blame him? He was *upset*, and he had every right to be.

Karl sighs to himself. He remembers being so angry, even having been brought to the point of *yelling* (which was certainly out of his comfort, though it had felt right in the moment).

The thing was, Karl was *not* the type of person to explode, let alone allow his feelings to grab ahold of himself like that. He even mentioned that in his dreadful speech, about thinking logically. Karl was logistical, always calculating his moves and words just so they have the right effect when brought over. Last night being the only exception.

Speaking from the heart was only acceptable in a handful of moments. He believes it to be deemed right when it was *safe* to. Even then, organizing the right circumstances to which would lead to when it was safe to do so took far more time and effort than it did to allow for the bitten words to take its course; so very rarely did he ever speak from the heart.

It was much easier to speak logically anyways.

A groan snakes its way from Karl's chest when he's managed to stand straight and tall: posture erect. If there was one thing he knew to do in order to avoid his restless mind, it was to keep himself busy.

Karl figures he'd make himself some coffee, so he does exactly that. Traveling to the kitchen, he grabs a mug and coffee grounds, measuring the right amount to put in the little reusable cup for the keurig. He closes the tab of the purple little thing before slotting it into the machine, and then closing the latch at the top of it, selecting the default setting of eight ounces.

He wasn't one to drink coffee, always opting for tea, much like George. Tea just soothed him more, though, right now, he doesn't think tea would do his body any good.

He wants to be energized, perhaps a little more jolt-like than to get all touchy-feely with himself whilst being alone in a dark home. That being said, he turns on the lights in the kitchen, the warm glow of the bulbs above welcoming him.

The kitchen was his safe space, if not his own bedroom. It was the [close] second place that he was well-versed in. Spices and utensils became his closest friends before he found complete comfort in Niki and George.

Speaking of Niki and George, he figures that they must've texted him sometime this morning, since he didn't bother showing up to school today. While his coffee brews, he returns to the living room to grab his cellphone, hoping he hadn't missed *too* many calls or texts.

Turning it on, he winces at all the notifications. There were two from his mother, plenty from Niki and George combined, and the most prominent, and perhaps the *most*, from Sapnap.

He ignores those ones, for now, at least, and clicks on his mother's.

She wishes him a good day, telling him that she had to go to work and that she would've stayed with him for breakfast if she could. He understands that she couldn't, and doesn't hold it against her. Besides, some time alone might do him some justice.

He quickly texts her a 'thank you' and 'love you' before clicking out of their private messages. His eyes skim over Niki and George, deciding to see what Niki had said in their personal messages.

*'School's canceled today. Storm completely flooded main hall'*

Good. At least Karl won't be given an absence for his sulking. He continues reading.

*'How're you doing? Sleep in?'*

The message had been sent maybe an hour ago. It felt all too cautious, almost like she wasn't trying to address what happened last night. He doesn't remember telling her, but perhaps he did. He doesn't know.

A few more text messages asking about Karl's plans for the day, but he doesn't bother answering them. He clicks off and opens up George's. George was less conspicuous about knowing.

*'Was with Dream last night. Sapnap called and'*

*'I'm sorry, Karl. Seriously. I don't know the full story, but I want you to know that Niki and I are always open ears. Whenever you're ready.'*

*'We're always on your side, okay? Call us.'*

Karl can't blame Sapnap for confiding in Dream. They were best friends, afterall, and when Karl stormed out like that... he can only allow for the other to be worried. He drove in one hell of a storm, and angrily too. It wasn't the best situation to be left in the dark about.

Part of him doesn't want to talk to George and Niki about it all, though. He doesn't want to be vulnerable like that ever again.

It made him sick to his stomach.

His fingers tap at the back of his phone. The thuds shake the device, and he's left staring at the top of his unread messages; all of which came from the same boy whose touch was all too gentle and words were all too painful.

He can read the preview of the last message that was sent, one so deep into the night that it bordered dawn.

*'I just want to know that you've made it home safely. Please, Karl.'*

Even after pushing Karl away, all Sapnap wanted to know was if the same boy he denied had made it home without a scratch.

His next breath is shaky as he reluctantly clicks their messages.

The first few only ask him to answer his calls. Karl faintly remembers how his phone vibrated in the cupholder of his car. He had ignored all of them.

*'Can we please talk? I didn't mean to upset you or offend you or anything like that'*

*'I want us to be sure, okay? Please call me.'*

Karl scoffs softly to himself. His chest starts to feel weighed down, his lungs compressed just slightly. He gets to the bottom fairly quickly, all of the messages in between just asking him to respond in some sort of way. Sapnap had claimed that he just needed to know if he was okay.

He doesn't know why he tortures himself like this, but Karl finds his fingers dwelling over his voice messages. There were two from Sapnap. He clicks on the first one.

“Voicemail left at- ten-fifty P.M- by- three three six, seven four three, one one eight nine.”

*“Hey Karl, I uh, I know you're... upset- with me. I would be too, honestly. A lot of what I meant to*

*say came out wrong and I wasn't listening to you like I should've and I just really want to clear things up. Please call me back, okay?"*

"Voicemail ended. To play again, please press two."

Karl starts the next message instead, feeling tears spring up to his eyes.

"Voicemail left at- twelve-fourteen A.M- by- three three six, seven four three, one one eight nine."

*"I'm guessing you don't want to talk right now, which is fair, I get it. And- and I'm not going to ask Niki and George about if they've heard from you or anything. You deserve to decide if you want to confide in them or whatever. I, uh, talked to Dream, though."*

A sharp inhale is heard from the other side.

*"He won't say anything, I asked him not to. It's just that... I was scared. God, I'm really, really scared, Karl."*

*"Please... let me know that you've at least made it home, at the very least."*

There's a stiff pause.

*"Good night, Karl."*

Karl's breath hitches.

"Voicemail ended. To play aga-"

Karl drops his phone onto the counter, turning it off in the process.

"Why?" Karl whispers to himself, voice shaky and all too fragile.

"Why do you care *so much?*"

Warm tears drip down his face, much to his dismay, as hiccups from compressed lungs erupted unwarningly from his chest. It burned: the tears, the sobs, the rawness of it all. The grinding sword wedged between his ribcage found solace in its twisting and turning.

It takes barely any time at all for Karl to become a complete utter mess; a circus show to a gala, faux patched grass to slick marble finished floors. What had he expected reading Sapnap's text message- *listening* to his voice for the first time since last night?

His left fist pounds into the granite of the countertop, shaking the ledge just slightly as sobs raced through Karl. The harsh hits against an innocent slab echo throughout the room, and his cries served as a melody to the poor harmony of his sniffling.

"Why can't I ju-ust- *hiccup* be mad a-at yo-ou?"

The words come out all ripped and mangled, and so distraught that only the pitiful walls of his kitchen listen. His chest likewise, feeling weighed and suffocated by less-than-sufficient realization and utter horror of feeling so much pain alone.

His knees buckle, and only his bony elbows carry his weak body. Karl's toes drag against the pressed-in tiles, some dipping into the grooves of the next square. His arms shake likewise, and aren't strong enough to keep him up.

Stomach sinking, he plummets onto the floor, knees absorbing the blow of the drop. The impact of the sudden dive into ceramic tiles would be sure to leave bruises and aches traveling up to his thighs.

But Karl doesn't care.

He doesn't know how long he sits on the floor, nails scraping against unforgiving tiles as he clutches for *anything*. The tears keep coming, dripping into a puddle beneath him. The sobs likewise, only loud and echoing throughout the kitchen and dining room.

He coughs harshly as the gross, slimy substance from his nose drips down his throats, blocking hiccups that press against his windpipe. His eyes are barely open, so swollen from crying now and the night before that they were better off being closed than to try to see in the first place. The excessive tears would've sealed that fate anyways, and the proof of it lies next to him.

Still, he hurts.

At least, until there is nothing more than his own breath occupying the air. What were once heavy heaves pulling for oxygen are now soft and compliant inhales and exhales, to a body pressed against the cold floor of his should-be-comforting kitchen.

All he can think of is *why*.

And *why* is the last thing he's thought of before drifting off into a slumber pulled by exhaustion.

Karl wakes up for a second time that day, only this time on the kitchen floor.

He groggily groans, cheek laying heavy on the tile and body likewise, only curled inwards of himself between two stools that attempt to encase him between the short wall of the counter and path to the living room.

He half expected to find himself soaked from his pitiful tears, if anything, drenched in his own personal ocean. Though, he's saved from the pathetic image of his weakness when he finds no evidence of any tears on his shirt or elsewhere.

He only aches in his lungs and knees.

There's another moment until he drags himself off the floor, pain shooting up his legs as he stands wobbly onto bruised knees. He curses softly as he grips a stool to his left for stability. God, he was a wreck.

Once he's gained his balance, he lets go, peering over the top of the familiar counter and at his lonesome phone and even more so lonesome, forgotten, more-than-likely cold mug of coffee that remained under the keurig from earlier this morning.

So much for keeping his mind busy.

Instead, thankfully, only a headache takes the place of any thought. The aftermath of crying so hard felt god awful, but at least it was a pain that was easily medicated with a pop of an ibuprofen. Whatever had taken place earlier... Karl's unsure of the remedy.

He knows he needs to eat something before taking anything, so he limps over to the pantry, snatching some stale saltine crackers before stuffing two of them into his mouth. Karl has barely

any appetite, but at least he's not stupid enough to avoid it entirely.

With the plastic sleeve of saltines in one hand, he reaches for his cellphone with the other. Checking the time, it was now eleven.

Under the clock lies a single message from Niki, and reading the preview, he gathers that she wants to come over.

He doesn't know if he can handle another sob fest.

Karl ignores it for now, instead picking up his mug of cold coffee and debated popping it into the microwave or to throw it away entirely. The sad void of black coffee taunts him, though, his reluctance in wasting any food at all overrides the latter.

He pops open his microwave, setting the mug inside and allows it to heat up before adding sugar and some creamer. Then, he snags a pill for his headache, chasing it down with hot, and still bitter regardless of his attempts to soften its stream, coffee. A gulp later, he waits.

For the time being, until Niki and George inevitably show up, he would sip his coffee and munch on crackers in the silent kitchen.

It's only twenty-two minutes before his doorbell rings.

A sigh slips its way from Karl's parted lips and into the half empty mug in his hand. He debates opening it at all, wondering if he's truly up to reminiscing about the night.

Tired feet find a path towards the door though, and he's in the routine of looking through the peephole to find his two friends on the other side waiting patiently with grim faces.

Pulling away, he lifts a hand towards the knob.

Karl's ready to twist it until he hears voices on the other side.

"He might still be asleep, Niki." The accent's muffled against the door.

A sigh, "I doubt he is."

Karl presses an ear to the wood, hand still resting on the knob.

"Even if he wasn't, maybe... we should leave him be. Come back tomorrow or whenever he answers us."

A pause. He should really answer the door.

"One more ring, and then... then we'll go."

The doorbell sounds, its shrill tone piercing the thick silence of the house.

Another pause.

There's shuffling on the other side.

His grip loosens.

The familiar roar of Niki's car hums against the door.

And he lets them leave.

His mother came home early that day.

He hears the front door open from his bedroom, and from it, the familiar voice of his only parent calling out for him.

Karl finds no energy to call back.

He's just so... tired.

After ignoring his two best friends right at his door, he had dragged his feet upstairs to his bedroom where he could take a shower. Upon stepping in, there was no second thought of the shower when his eyes fall immediately to the sweater Sapnap had gifted him. It sat on his dresser.

From there, he was crying, yet again.

“Karl?”

It's from the stairs, and he *knows* he should get up and meet her halfway rather than let her climb all the way up to see him sulk pathetically in his bedroom. Karl can't though, his body's weight pooling into the center of his mattress and sheets far from covering any part of him.

He inhales and closes his eyes. Perhaps he could fake sleeping for a moment.

A few soft knocks land at his door. Karl doesn't get up, and instead it creaks open slowly. He only focuses on what he can hear, but the carpet muffles any steps he tries to zone in on.

All of a sudden, there's a pond at the side of his bed. A gentle hand swims over his arm, tickling his exposed skin.

“I love you.”

A whisper.

Karl doesn't open his eyes.

He wakes up the third time that day more exhausted than ever.

One glance at the blind-opened window and he can tell it's evening. Another glance at the clock above his door and he confirms his suspicions.

His desk lamp is on, but the overhead lights are not. Other than the sinking sun, his lamp is the other other source of light in the room.

An inhale, and he pulls himself up in a sitting position.

A dull pain shoots through his body, most likely from the stiffness of sleeping. He winces and halts, waiting a minute before continuing his rise. A twist of his back and the pressure on his spine is relieved, allowing him full mobility to land on his feet.

Karl felt groggy, almost zombie-like, and it had only been a day.

*A day.*

It was only *a day* since his and Sapnap's talk.

Karl doesn't know why he can't get over it. It shouldn't have been such a big deal, though, something within him holds tight. Perhaps it's his stubbornness, or even his cry for a sense of independent thought and action, but he'd spent the entire day sulking about and bursting into tears at the mere thought of the boy.

All he had asked of Karl was to think on it some more, and what should've been words of concern from the heart felt more like a stab in the back; a big sign of rejection from the other.

Karl had been so gullible to think that he was subject to rejection. It very well was a possibility, and he even discussed the concept in his head hours prior to his arrival. He guesses he just never believed it.

Karl steps over to his desk, taking a seat in the chair. He didn't want to spend another minute of the remainder of his day in the bed that carried too many tears.

Perhaps his perception of what Sapnap had said was wrong. The influx of emotions coursing through his veins never stilled his actions, only fueling a defensive stance rather than one willing to listen whole-heartedly.

It just... sucked. Karl was hurt- he was pained after being so damn vulnerable. Part of him felt like an idiot for even thinking of doing such, but the other part congratulated him. The latter was a small sliver of what was left of his rational mind. And sliver was more than correct.

He combs a hand through his hair, sighing outwardly before leaning back in his chair to stare at the familiar grooves of his ceiling.

Karl has no clue what stage of grief he was on, but whatever the level, he hated it.

He hated feeling so weak and so fragile; like a baby bird made of glass, or something of the sort. He despised being pitied, which was probably the reason why he avoided his friends and mother this entire day. Those closest to him were only trying to help, but in Karl's mind, all he can think of is how pathetic he looked.

That's what he was in his eyes; pathetic.

He felt pathetic for putting himself out there. He felt pathetic for storming away like that. He felt pathetic for sobbing to his mother and to his own self. He just felt off-puttingly pathetic.

Even though he *knows* deep down inside, Karl Jacobs is nothing of the sort.

He takes a deep breath.

What he really needed to do was to find the confidence to go about his day as normal- to keep his chin up and emotions at check. If he had the ability to leave all that was bothering him at bay, then he wouldn't have to worry so much about being inauthentic. He would forget until... until he was over the whole thing.

He just needed to figure out how.

“I can do this,” Karl says to no one in particular. He waves his hands like he’s shaking them off, “Just, forget.”

He sits in his chair with eyes closed. Karl actively tries to fish out all the thoughts of Sapnap from his mind. He imagines himself pushing the mere mention of the name in his head away, sending them off into a burning trash pile in the center of his mind.

The ticking of the clock in his room mocks him.

All he can think of now *is* Sapnap.

Karl’s shoulders drop as he sighs heavily. Not even a minute later of his foolish attempt at magically making this all go away and he’s giving up.

Not a moment later and his phone, that now lays face down onto his bed-side table dings. He had received a message.

If Karl Jacobs knew any better, he would choose not to get up and walk towards the phone. He wouldn’t bother looking at it knowing that the likelihood of it being from either his two friends, his mother, or the other one that now occupied his mind. Karl isn’t that stupid to send himself off onto *another* sobbing competition (to which he only competes with himself) after reading a text about the whole situation.

Except, Karl Jacobs didn’t know any better.

He picks up the phone, flipping it over to see the screen.

*‘If you’re going to ignore your friends because of me, then we really need to talk.’*

Karl curses under his breath. He didn’t think they’d go to Sapnap.

Another message pops up.

*‘I’m stopping by in the morning.’*

## Chapter End Notes

He's gotta grieve for *at least* one chapter.

Expect Sapnap and Karl interactions in the next chapter. Also, perhaps a resolution?  
Maybe some truths unfolding?

Sorry for the wait, but this nice break was really needed. Not sure if it'll actually take a whole month again to update, but follow my twitter for updates - @VeeBeeTea

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter :)

## Revelations

### Chapter Notes

TW // IMPLIED/MENTIONED CHARACTER DEATH (now added to tags), anxiety

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Needless to say, Karl couldn't sleep that night.

Perhaps it were the fact that he took three separate sob-induced naps during the day, but Karl Jacobs could *not* sleep that night.

Instead, he lies belly-up on his bed, watching his fan whirl about, trying to muffle the sounds of that stupid, taunting clock above his door. He's considered putting a rock to it, or better yet, simply throwing it away. It's staccato chuckles made Karl want to rip his hair out.

The boy on the bed sighs deeply, feeling a flourish of restlessness from his chest. His heart beats quicker than usual, an uncertain nervousness trickling into his veins. It's not enough to send him spiraling, but the threat still lies at the bay. It's agitating.

He turns his head, now tired of staring at the same spinning fan. Instead, his eyes lay upon the poor remnants of his more-than-thankful dinner.

A bowl of half-eaten chicken noodle soup and an empty water bottle sits on his nightstand. His mother had stopped by in the midst of his sulking to bring him dinner.

She had cooked one of his favorites: his mother's personal rendition of chicken noodle soup.

Karl appreciated the more simplistic meals- especially ones that he could never recreate. The soup, especially, had been kept secret from him for the sole purpose that if he wanted it, *she* had to make it.

It was a memory soup. One of those broths that parents made for their children when they returned home with stuffy noses and cold fingertips. Karl can remember the amount of times he came home shivering from sitting on the frozen turf of his elementary school's playground. Yes, he was bundled in a pooling winter coat, though, Karl tended to sit and read *Geronimo Stilton* books instead of running around like the other kids. Their relentless energy of swinging on monkey bars and playing tag about the gated slides and ladder alike fueled any other kid's need for warmth; but not Karl.

So, oftentimes, he'd come home awfully shivering and rubbing his arms up and down from the harshness of the winter air. And each time, his mother would whip up a bowl of her chicken noodle soup. It wasn't long till Karl figured out that she'd make it any time he came home with a frosted tipped nose, so he started leaving his jacket in his cubby rather than wear it outside.

It worked for a while; Karl ended his days reading at the playground before going inside to grab his backpack and get on the bus home. Then at home, he was greeted by his mother and a bowl of her soup. Eventually, though, his teacher found the stash of jackets in the back of his cubby (as his

mother kept supplying him more to stop the pale-bluish skin from welcoming her in the afternoon) and called his mother notifying her.

Needless to say, a long conversation later, and a plethora of tears, his mother discovered his not-so-thought-out plan for soup. Ever since then, all he had to do was ask.

Karl didn't ask for soup last night, but she brought it anyway.

His mother didn't say much when she came in. She had set the bowl, spoon, and water bottle down onto a coaster onto his desk and offered him a small smile. Karl attempted to muster some sort of smile back, but it fell short, a small tug of his lips waving slightly.

"School's cancelled again tomorrow," she had told him, shifting her weight to her other foot in the doorway, "I couldn't find anyone to take my shift in the morning, but I'll be coming back home early again."

Karl had frowned at the mention of her attempt at finding someone to cover her. "You didn't have to," he said sheepishly, eyebrows bunching slightly, "I'm fine."

She only looks at him. Karl knows the look.

His mother always knew when he was lying.

"I love you," she said.

"I love you too."

From there, she turned around, leaving him with a hot bowl of soup and an unopened water bottle. A few minutes later, Karl attempted to eat just a bit. All he had was crackers and half a mug's worth of coffee; and any water previously evaporated from heated tears.

He blew on his spoon, hand shaking slightly as he brought it up to his face. He inhaled. The dancing scents of equal broth and earth fueled his nostrils.

It brought him back to the first grade again.

He smiled slightly himself, reminiscing about his failed ploy for soup, before bringing the spoon up to his lips. After the first few bites, he managed to eat about half of the bowl.

Since then, he's been lying awake on his bed, hours past the gift brought up to him.

Karl sighs. Somewhere between now and the afternoon, Sapnap would stop by and knock on his door, perhaps even calling his cellphone numerous times accompanied by countless text messages. Of course, Karl could stay in his room and ignore it all; placing his phone on 'do not disturb' and playing music so loudly that the doorbell can't penetrate through his door.

He very well could block out any way for Sapnap to come in, even going as far to snatch the extra key from the flower pot in his front door in case the boy knew of its existence. Karl hopes that it won't come to that.

The point being, if Karl decided to, he knows he can avoid the boy and continue his days of sulking alone. Perhaps Sapnap would gather the message that Karl didn't want to talk to him now.

Though, that's a message Karl doesn't know if he wants to send.

The thing was that Karl doesn't know period.

He doesn't know how to decide or act- or even feel. Karl's at a standstill with himself, and he only wishes that it was easier.

He wishes he knew the answers to it all. Karl wants to know *why*, and *how*, and *everything* regarding the night and even prior to. It was just a mess of a situation.

Which is why Karl thinks part of him *wants* to talk to Sapnap in the sun's wake.

Granted, Karl couldn't go a single minute without thinking of him and collapsing into a poor pile of pity and pain. If anything, seeing and hearing Sapnap in person since that night would probably send him straight to the floor immediately.

Yet, he knows he can't continue on like this. Crying, sobbing, wheezing, hiccuping; all of it, he can't do it anymore. After one day of performing such a tiresome tragedy to himself, he realizes that he can't spend days or weeks or even as much as months like this.

It isn't healthy.

So, now as the clock ticks a solid five in the morning, with birds beginning to chirp for their start of the day, Karl talks himself through everything that he wanted to know.

He runs through all the questions burning into his skull, practicing the delivery and possible answers that could come shooting at him. He anticipates that burning feeling in his lungs and that shakiness he could never shoo off from his fingertips, and thus he notes to bring water and a sweatshirt in response.

Karl's got all the immediate remedies to any symptoms of a nervous breakdown reaching his brain receptors on lock. Tissues, his phone, blankets, and the water and sweatshirt likewise, all piled into the center of his room to bring downstairs.

Soon, his mother would leave for work and Karl would be able to spread his comfort items between the couch and the coffee table in the living room. Until then, he snags everything (but keeping his phone in his pocket instead) and quietly creeps down the stairs.

He knows exactly where to step to avoid the creaks and moans of the floorboards shifting beneath him. Karl manages to step onto the ground floor with his supply kit with no worries. They end up in the closet beneath the stairs, hidden until it was safe to put them into their places.

Reaching a half hour till seven, he goes ahead and makes coffee for both his mother and himself. She would be getting up soon, and Karl's too good of a son, and a human being at that, to avoid her purposely after she had brought him her special chicken noodle soup. Karl notes to bring that bowl down later.

“Karl?”

The boy in question looks behind him, seeing his mother dressed in her scrubs, holding her purse in one hand and keys in the other.

“Good morning.” Karl says kindly, offering her a pure smile this time around. He pours her a cup of coffee in a transportable cup before giving her the sugar container so that she can put her desired amount. She takes it hesitantly.

“Thank you- why are you up this early? I told you school was cancelled, right?” She asks, stirring

in her sugar.

Karl nods, "Yeah- um, just wanted to tell you thank you before you left." It wasn't entirely a lie, but he didn't want to tell her that the same boy that sent her child home exasperated and upset was going to be arriving within the next few hours.

Her face softens, her hand now reaching over the counter to thumb his cheek gently. "Anytime, sweetpea, anytime," she speaks softly. "How are you feeling?"

Karl sighs, shrugging his shoulders, "A little better, I guess. I'll tell you more when you get home today."

She only nods and runs her thumb back and forth along the soft flesh of his face. His mother displayed her love through physical touch and acts of service.

"Alright. Whenever you're ready, I'll be here to listen," she offers, and then checking her watch, "except for right now, I gotta leave for work."

Karl lets out a small giggle, "In a rush?"

She retracted her hand to twist the top of her cup. "I was planning on getting coffee on the way. Woke up later than usual," she gestures to the cup, "except my sweet son already made some, so I guess I won't be getting there late after all."

Karl nods, following her to the door as she checks to make sure she has everything. Stepping into her slip-grade medical shoes, his mother gives Karl a tight hug and kiss on the cheek before running out the door. Karl wishes her a good day and for her to drive safely before allowing the door to close shut.

Once she's backed out of the driveway and on her way, Karl marches for the closet to take out his comfort items to set out. The blankets and sweatshirt he planned on wearing would remain on the far corner of the couch, and the tissues and water bottle stand still on the coffee table. He thinks it's all he'll need, if not a slipper to throw if he were emotional enough. Though, he'll try really hard not to allow it to get to that point.

Now, instead of searching for a pair of slippers, he plays the waiting game.

He doesn't know when Sapnap plans on swinging by, or if his text was only just a threat. Was he actually going to show up at his house? Or was he only scaring Karl into being nicer to his friends?

To be fair, Karl thought that they would get the hint that he wouldn't want to be seeing anyone anytime soon. What the night had brought was something Karl needed to deal with on his own first before confiding in anyone. He was more shocked at the fact that they went to Sapnap.

It frustrated him a little bit; how they went to him the same day they went to Karl. It made sense, especially if they had been so worried that they weren't receiving any word from Karl himself (which, granted, he suspects that he too would probably be a little anxious about himself if he were in their place). Still, though, it pained him slightly to know that they went to them, even if it were all in Karl's doing to drive them there.

Karl sighs, plopping down onto the couch and checking his phone. There were no more messages from either his friends or Sapnap, not that he expected there to be any since Karl hadn't bothered to answer any of them.

It was daunting, reading over Niki and George's contacts. He really should tell them, for their sake

and for his own, as it would only eat at him more if he didn't. It was just... hard.

Karl bites his lip. It was only fair that if he was going to talk with Sapnap, then he'd have to talk to the others. He *really* should have talked to them *first*, but in his moment of distress, he decided not to. Part of him regrets it, the other part doesn't; as much as he hated the singular day of sulking, he learned that it just wasn't for him, and now he doesn't think he'll ever take that route again.

His thumb clicks on the group chat between him, Niki, and George. Karl thinks for a moment, debating how to word that he was okay (for now) and that he'll tell them what happened. It's for the best that they know sooner rather than later, now that he thinks of it, but he can't bother to explain it through text when he's having this much difficulty creating this message to begin with.

He types away at the brightly lit letters on his screen. The process is slow: writing a few words at a time only to delete them quickly. It's hard to settle on exactly what he wants to say.

After a few tries, he settles onto one.

*'Hey guys, sorry I haven't called or texted back.'*

He follows it with this.

*'I'm okay, I promise. We'll talk later?'*

Karl assumes that his talk with Sapnap won't take all that long, that is, if he ever shows up. It was nearing nine now, and something tells him that the boy might've just been bluffing. Though, with Sapnap, he tended to stick to his word, and when he was determined, he was *determined*.

He was the embodiment of what a teenage boy should be like, and Karl can't decide whether or not he liked that.

*Ding*

Karl's pulled from his inner dilemma by a text from his cellphone. Immediately, he notices that it was a message from Niki. She was always rather quick to answer her phone, and Karl, himself, doubts that George was even awake now to reply.

*'That's good to hear ~ how does three @ mine sound?'*

It's short and concise, just the way he hoped it'd be. Karl nods to no one in particular before quickly replying in agreement and placing his phone back down onto the table.

Until it would unceremoniously turn twelve and the notion of Sapnap arriving in the morning disappeared from his radar, and all he had to worry about was for his latter meeting at three, Karl decided he would do some quick cleaning.

He goes back upstairs, retrieving his abandoned bowl of chicken noodle soup in one hand and the contents of his trash can in the other. Karl sets the dish into the sink, gathering the rest of the trash throughout the house and hauling it outside.

What was once pulled taut by angry clouds and jealous lightning is now decorated with friendly wisps and illuminated brightly. Karl hasn't been outside in the last two days. The warm rays tickle his skin as he makes his way across his porch over to the paved walkway.

A few steps to his left and he sees one of his neighbors. The houses in his neighborhood were fairly suburbanly-close, and his relationship to those living inside them likewise.

It wasn't very often he got to see any of them now, seeing as most were gone when he was, and in their return, Karl was found upstairs in his bedroom, engrossed in numbers and words alike.

Mr. Watson, or Phil, as he so asked Karl to call him after he reached the ripe age of fifteen, was cautiously stepping across his front yard to his mailbox. While the sky contained no remnants to the horrid storm, their front yards proved otherwise. The rain had flooded both of them (and all of them in the neighborhood), the dirt holding the grass now turned into an unforgiving sludge with quicksand consistency.

"Good morning!" Karl chirps anyway, gaining his attention. His mother always taught him to say something if he were to notice the other first; it was only respectful that he did.

Mr. Watson turns around, slightly startled to hear a voice other than his own this morning. When his eyes reach Karl, they crinkle in delight, a smile tugging at his thin lips.

His thick, British accent warms the boy, "Good morning, Karl boy. How are you?" Mr. Watson, like George, immigrated from the UK, though, Mr. Watson held a stronger, heartier dialect than George had.

Karl tilts his head to the side slightly, the bag of trash now resting on the pavement beside him. "I'm alright," he calls back, "how are Tommy and Tubbo holding up?"

Mr. Watson was a single father with two little boys. Tommy and Tubbo, a disastrous, though entertaining, duo.

The two boys were a handful, always finding themselves in some sort of odd trouble. Karl only knows because there had been plenty of times he'd spent his evening in the Watson residence, especially when he had been younger and not old enough to stay at home alone.

His mother's long shifts left him walking to Mr. Watson's house, greeted by two rambunctious little ones. When Karl was in middle school, the other two were in elementary school, constantly dragging Karl's wrist back and forth, showing him anything and everything.

From the countless hand turkey masterpieces pinned onto their refrigerator door, to the less appeasing 'mud pies' in the back garden, Karl aided as a makeshift babysitter. He never minded, knowing that it was the least he could do when being so graciously housed by the Watsons. It gave Mr. Watson a small break too, especially from a long day's work.

When Karl wasn't being shown the boy's creations, he was helping them with their homework at the dining room table, explaining how fractions worked to the frustrated, red-faced Tommy, who *always* lacked in math, and assisting Tubbo in reading small passages on mice and rabbits alike. It were times like these that Karl began tutoring, and he's grateful that it had been; they were the hardest pupils he had to work with in all his years of tutoring. Now he was prepared for anything.

"They're alright, playing video games in the living room. You know, middle school boy type of things," Mr. Watson replied with a small smile. He grabs the mail from his metal box in the front of his yard, "How's your mother? She's not still working overtime at the hospital, is she?"

Karl shakes his head, shifting his weight to his other hip. "No sir, she's just on morning shift right now."

Mr. Watson sighs, running through his hair with his free hand, "Good, she's an ambitious one, that is. But you already knew that."

Karl offers a smile out of gratitude, "And so are you, Mr. Watson."

The man coughs, “Gah, Karl, you make me feel old, calling me Mr. Watson,” he begins to make his way back across his yard, “I only excuse you because I know your mother raised you right.”

Karl chuckles at this, “You’re not old. You still look the same as you did fifteen years ago.”

Mr. Watson rolls his eyes, “Fifteen years ago you were just crawling. What are you now? Seventeen?”

He nods. Seventeen and nearly out of high school, that is.

“You and the boys are growing up too quickly for my liking,” he huffs hiking through the newly formed terrain of his front lawn, “Soon, Tommy’ll come back home one day with a ‘woman’.” He uses air quotes. “Heaven forbid he stays in this phase of his when that happens.”

Grabbing his trash bag, Karl winces in pity. Tommy was certainly in a *phase*, one that revolved around him referring to girls his age as ‘women’ as so to be suave. As much as Mr. Watson hopes he finds his way in charming the ladies, Karl has a feeling that it was just in his nature to act this way.

“Maybe,” Karl says, hauling the bag over to his trash can located at the side of his house, “I only hope so.”

Mr. Watson makes it to his paved walkway to the house. “And what about you, if you don’t mind me asking, is there any ‘woman’ in your life?”

Karl pauses.

Did Sapnap count? Even now?

He’s saved the answer to the question when a familiar red pickup truck enters the cul- de-sac.

Karl’s eye catches it immediately, face tightening and shoulder tensing in defense as it rounds about, slowly coming to a stop in front of his front yard. In it, the boy in question.

The rolling of the engine stops, cutting off abruptly as both Karl and Mr. Watson stand in their front driveways awaiting the stranger to exit out of the vehicle.

A click, and the hinges to the red, run-down, truck swings open with a sharp creak. And there he was, the culprit to all things spiraling within Karl steps out, in all his glory. Or at least, enough glory to sport large, gray, comfortable-looking sweatpants, and an old *Nike* sweatshirt accompanied to it.

Mr. Watson stands with his arms crossed, eyes squinting to catch a firm look at the other. He must’ve noticed the shift in tension with Sapnap’s arrival. The older man almost looks like he’s on watch, like a tall security guard protecting precious jewels and royalties likewise. It was a stance Karl only recognized seldomly.

Karl feels his hands shake and mouth grow dry. Of course in his long wait, he would be caught off guard to witness Sapnap’s grand entrance, much less outside the comfort of his own home. He can’t deny that he’s anxious, and he and Mr. Watson both know that there’s mixed feelings with this Sapnap now turning around from closing his door to his car.

“Good morning,” Mr. Watson’s voice is now deep and solemn, a friendly greeting turned sour, “you a friend of Karl’s?”

Sapnap can sense it too, offering a small smile and waiting for Karl's notion to move from where he stood. Karl feels as though if Sapnap were to move without his approval, Mr. Watson would take care of the 'issue' at hand.

"Yes sir," Sapnap clears his throat, "I was going to send a text but I figured that..." he trails off, not daring to finish his sentence when Mr. Watson's eyes are burning a hole into the side of his face. He looks different, Sapnap, the confident aura that traveled with him about now turned into ashes.

He wore a sore poncho made of dread.

And that made two of them.

"It's okay, Mr. Watson," Karl manages, voice wavering slightly, "he's a friend." The words sting his tongue, nearly wincing at the title. *Friend*.

Karl cocks his head slightly towards his own door, looking at the boy at the front of his driveway. Sapnap takes it as an invitation onto his property.

Mr. Watson clicks his tongue, obviously noticing the hesitancy in Karl's tone. He was good at picking up things like that, always sensing when his mother was close to tears from working so many hours that she hardly had the strength to pick up a tissue for herself. Now, he can feel Karl grow in discomfort as Sapnap makes his way up the cemented flooring of his driveway.

"I'll be right inside, Karl," the older man notes, making sure Karl knows that he's available any moment, "just holler if you need me."

Karl offers him a small smile, "Thank you."

With that, Sapnap's a few feet away from Karl, both now watching Mr. Watson return to his own home. He clicks his heels and scrapes them on the ancient welcome mat to his front door. A soft look at Karl, a threatening glance at the other, and he steps inside, leaving the two boys in front of Karl's garage.

"Mr. Watson?" Sapnap asks quietly to Karl.

He snaps his head away from the other house, now at Sapnap. Karl clears his throat again, "My neighbor."

Though, Karl could argue that he wasn't just a neighbor. He was more like the father he never had, but he won't admit that to Sapnap.

Another moment passes by in silence before Karl takes lead.

"Let's go inside."

It takes Karl a total of three breaths to calm himself before reaching inside. He feels anxiety ripple through him harshly, the alarm bells in his head sounding about, establishing a wave of chaos in his mind. Karl brushes it off, hand stuttering as he grasps the door handle. 'I can do this', he thinks.

Inside, it's cold. The warm sun no longer tickles Karl's skin, the breeze of his AC steals its place. It's less of a faint reminder than previous rays. A shiver runs down his spine.

"Do you want anything to drink?" Karl offers, voice small, and glances at the boy who's taking off

his shoes. He shakes his head, not bothering to look up.

“I’m good, thank you.”

Karl takes a seat at his end of the couch, all of his supplies ready for him to use inconspicuously. When Sapnap finishes taking off his shoes, he notes the more lonesome end of the couch, occupying the edge gently, as if any quick movement would shatter the furniture; or Karl, for that matter of fact.

Even though the AC rips through the house, brisk and chilly winds cutting between the hairs on Karl’s arms, it begins to feel stuffy- almost suffocating. It’s only the two of them in the room, and the hesitance between them to speak weighed heavily in the air.

Where would they start? At the beginning? With an apology? Was there an apology needing to be addressed? *Surely-*

Karl takes a deep breath, attempting to settle his racing mind. There was no use in getting himself worked up now, not when he had so much to say. Now being in his house- *his* turf, Karl feels like he has some sort of upper hand in this. He feels like he has more control than he did at Sapnap’s.

The silence presses against Karl’s chest, nonetheless. It’s the small sounds he hears that overstimulates him. He needs to say something.

“Why didn’t you-”

“Karl, I-”

They both stop harshly.

Karl can feel the blood rushing to his face as he’s met with their interruptions to each other.

“Go ahead,” Sapnap offers, dropping his shoulders, “I uh, I’m sure you have a lot of questions.” *Isn’t that the truth.*

Karl swallows thickly, advertising his attention to the table. He can’t get shy now.

“Why didn’t... Why do you...” he struggles forming the words, all of them lodged in the back of his throat as he forces himself not to melt away into the carpet.

“Why don’t you trust me?”

It’s a question that’s been eating away at Karl for a while now.

Sapnap takes a moment.

“It’s not that I don’t trust you, Karl, it’s-” he stops himself, biting his lip as though the words were to tumble out if he hadn’t. There was more, and Karl can’t help but push.

“It’s what, Sapnap?” Karl snaps a little too harsh for his liking, “because I- I *trusted* you.” He grabs his own fingers, tugging on them to ease the emotional panic settling in, “I trusted you with everything and- and when you said... said that I was the one who wasn’t ready, I...” He trails off, sighing, stopping himself before he gets too worked up. It’s only been a minute since they’ve started talking and he already feels the dainty thread holding him together begin to fray.

“I trust you,” Sapnap admits calmly, locking eyes with the other. “I trust that you’re honest- and truthful, about everything. You’re nothing but sincere and genuine and you deserve the same from

me.”

Karl’s eyebrows furrow slightly at this. His arms cross and toes curl inward, the implication Sapnap alluded to sending his nerves tingling. “What are you implying?” Karl asks coolly, fingers gripping a bit more into his skin, “is- is there something I should know?”

Dread makes the hairs on Karl’s neck stand. Now he wonders if he had been played, a game trope to any fictional story. It sparks a new take.

Sapnap takes a deep breath, “It’s- It’s not... not *like that*. It’s just... there’s a lot and-”

“I want to know everything, Sapnap,” Karl interrupts coldly, “I don’t want to tiptoe around whatever is happening. Just tell me.” A sort of confidence erupts in Karl, sudden need to take a defensive stance seconds after the desire to curl up in a ball and call it a day.

The boy winces at this, “Sorry- yes, I’ll tell you everything. I don’t know where to start.”

Karl notes the harshness in his own tone, taking it down a bit. “How about the beginning?” He offers lightly, crossing his legs.

Sapnap exhales, “Then the beginning.”

A few seconds left in thought and Karl wonders if he’s even ready to hear what he had to say. Was he in the right mindset to process answers he might not expect? Would it be awful, the news? He can’t tell, and if Sapnap had taken one more moment, Karl just might have called it off. Sapnap didn’t take that moment.

“It wasn’t always me and Dream, you know? We had plenty of other friends- friends from the teams we played on, friends from our classes, friends from our neighborhoods... you get the gist of it,” he smiles briefly.

Karl only listens.

“We met this kid at tryouts for soccer one day. This was in middle school and Dream and I, well, we had been playing for as long as we could remember. We figured he had just moved here,” Sapnap chuckles to himself, “his name was Alex.”

Karl tenses. He immediately recognises the name, mind pinpointing that framed photo in Sapnap’s room of the tanned skinned and glowing smile of the boy.

“Back then he was such a scrawny kid, small too. But he was fast, so fast even, that he ended up on the team after all. Threw us all who had been playing with each other for years for a loop,” he shifts his body in his seat, “Anyways, the point was, Alex was part of the team now and was part of the team for years afterwards, even when Dream and I switched to basketball and football.”

Karl nods, wondering where Sapnap was going with this. It intrigues him, but draws in an unsettling pool at the base of his stomach.

“We all got close to him, I more than anyone,” Sapnap chuckles to himself softly, “he just fit right in, even if he was like five feet tall and had hair that curled at the back of his neck, always being too long to fit in that ridiculous beanie of his.”

“He never went anywhere without that hat, even if it was ninety degree weather, he wore it. Alex was resilient like that- and stubborn too.”

Karl remembers that 'LAFD' beanie from the picture. He takes his word for it.

Sapnap twitches, "Anyways, we all became friends and whatnot. Spent every moment of every day together; even having our schedules switched to line up all of our classes during the school year. Alex was just as much of a... of a friend as Dream was, you know?"

"And we're boys. Boys in middle school, entering high school, and I, even worse of a boy, dating a girl I had no interest in. I just knew that boys were supposed to like girls, but I didn't- I didn't find a liking to any. I didn't know why then, but I knew girls liked me. So I thought, 'If a girl liked me enough, surely I could like them back', right?" Sapnap furrows his brows at himself, "if you couldn't tell, that never worked out as it was planned."

Karl bites his lip. He understood where Sapnap was getting from. So many times in the last seventeen years of his life he found no interest in girls. He had no interest in pursuing anyone for that matter of fact, until, at least, Sapnap came around. Which is what made this harder- it was that Karl had found an interest in *Sapnap*.

"The guilt got to me freshman year and I had to get it off my chest. So I told Alex. I didn't tell Dream at the time yet because he was dating a girl he liked so much that I didn't think he'd understand. Alex, though- I'd never seen him marvel over any girl. He always scrunched his nose and shook his head," Sapnap admits. He clenches his fists, "He told me in secret that maybe girls just weren't for me."

"And I was so upset. So upset, even, that I yelled at him, disagreeing because I couldn't accept the fact that he was right and that my own feared suspicions were right. I didn't want- I couldn't be gay. I just *couldn't*."

With a shaky breath, Sapnap's hands clench even harder, "I stormed off that night, running in the street to get away. I didn't get far because that stupidly fast kid caught up to me- but I'm thankful he did. Four o'clock at night and we walked until I stopped crying. Then we talked about it. I found out he... y'know... like guys too."

Karl nods, sheepishly avoiding eye contact. He had a feeling that he knew where this was going. It makes him trace circles on his hoodie that sat now in his lap.

"I think it was inevitable that we were going to date each other," Sapnap swallows, "I mean, we were the only ones we knew that... that were even the slightest bit into guys. It was supposed to just help me figure it out- feel a little more at ease with who I was."

Sapnap closes his eyes in thought, "It was nice; I already knew him, and he knew me, and we were already so, so, so close. Felt like the same as always, only now I could... express myself- the true me, as cliche as it sounds."

Another moment passes by.

"Loving Alex came easy. What was hard was containing that," Sapnap opens his eyes, harrowing slightly, "I grew comfortable with my truth and I wanted more. I wanted to show off someone who meant so much to me- I wanted the world to know how amazing he was and how happy he made me."

"I was a sixteen year old boy on the varsity football team. Most of the boys on that team I had known for years too, and surprisingly enough, coming out to them was more of a successful feat than anything. Either they were just chill with me or Dream threatened them enough to warrant some sort of respect- I don't know."

Sapnap chuckles at this to himself.

“Alex, though,” the boy bites this inside of his cheek, “was a little more different. He didn’t want to be out and- and I should’ve respected that. I should’ve let him take his time than to keep pushing it, you know?”

Sapnap blinks a few times, “I *really* should’ve just been thankful that I even *had* him like that. And I’m so- so thankful that I did.” He sniffles, wiping away at his eyes, “I’m sorry, I’m getting to the point, I swear.”

Karl reaches for a tissue, handing it to him in sincerity, “It’s alright.”

Sapnap thanks him gently. “Anyways, I uh, *we* just disagreed there. It led to our mutual break-up; no hard feelings, nothing. I mean, at the beginning, I was a little hurt. More hurt about how much of a dick I was, but if there was anything I appreciated most about Alex was how forgiving he was. He forgave me for it all, so we remained friends.”

“He had to move not too long after that, something about his dad finding good work up north, so maybe it was best that we ended off being good friends. I’d take being his friend more than anything now,” Sapnap smiles to himself.

“We — most of the old team — made plans to meet with him. We all planned to carpool up to see him one weekend. But Alex- Alex didn’t want us wasting all that gas and money on hotels so... so he offered to come down here instead.”

The boy on the edge of the couch was now trembling. Karl feels the urge to come closer- to show some sort of *comfort*. Out of his heart he would.

“When that weekend came around, a storm formed between here and where he lived. We paid no mind to it- it was just some rain, right?”

Karl feels the same heart that offered so much drop to his stomach.

“No-” he feels himself whisper.

“I’ll spare you the details- I think you know,” A tear rolls down the boy’s cheek, “God, sorry, I uh- it’s been like two years since then, I shouldn’t be-”

Karl can’t stop himself from scooting over to hug him. He slides over his lap, two arms immediately reaching around him and embracing him deeply. Sapnap’s chest heaves with breaths that threaten to escape quicker than what a calm state could supply.

They sit there like that for a moment. Sapnap opens and closes his mouth frequently, trying to put out more words. Only silent tears wet Karl’s shoulders, but he only tightens his grip on the boy beneath him. Sapnap’s hands clasp on Karl’s lower back, holding him, but not drawing him any closer than Karl chose to be.

This whole time Karl believed otherwise; that it was Karl who was all too slow or scared or inexperienced for Sapnap. He never thought that there had been *something else* that nagged the other so deeply like this- this burden of a tragedy that Sapnap carried *alone*.

If only Karl had known.

But that was all up to Sapnap, and Karl will only be appreciative that he got to hear a memory like this from someone who kept so much to himself.

“I’m sorry,” Sapnap whispered hoarsely, “I’m so, so sorry.”

“Shhh,” Karl hushes, rubbing his back, “Thank you for telling me.”

The others sniffled, “I only wanted you to feel comfortable. I never meant to offend you or upset you or anything like that.” He taps Karl’s shoulder to pull away in order to face each other.

“You deserve so much, Karl.”

Karl smiles gently, wiping away the tears that stained Sapnap’s face.

“And you deserve so much as well.”

Sapnap shakes his head slightly, closing his eyes, but Karl continues rubbing his thumb along his cheek.

“You do,” Karl assures softly, “we’re just kids, Sapnap. You shouldn’t blame yourself for something you couldn’t control. You *can’t* blame yourself. Things just... happen.”

“What happened in the past can’t change. And I know you’ve done some wrong, but you, yourself, said you were forgiven. Alex forgave you for what happened, and you’ve learned from your mistakes, don’t you think?”

Sapnap whispers, “What do you mean?”

“I mean that today you’re constantly asking if I’m okay with what we’re doing. Even if it’s something as simple as holding hands, you are *always* making sure that I am 100% alright with what’s going on. Sapnap, you have made the point to *verbally* check in with me, and I have *always* appreciated that, you know?” Karl pauses, “You are always so good to me, especially that I’m still figuring it all out. You’re so patient and kind and so willing- I am so thankful for you.”

Sapnap opens his eyes, now staring right into Karl’s. They beg for reassurance.

“I thought it was because you didn’t trust me, which was so selfish of me to assume. Even though I could never know something like this happened, I shouldn’t have assumed that. *That* was wrong of me.”

Karl inhales, “I’m sorry for jumping to conclusions, and for ignoring you this past day. I know better than to not communicate after something as big as this, so for that, I’m really, really, sorry.”

Sapnap nods, “It’s okay. I forgive you.”

He smiles, “Thank you. And- and I won’t drive in the rain like that again. It was unsafe either way, regardless of what you told me today.”

“You couldn’t have known, I haven’t been open with you, like, at all,” Sapnap counters. “I was scared to tell you- scared to drive you away. I didn’t want you to think any differently of me.”

Karl shakes his head, “This doesn’t change anything about how I feel about you. I mean, I’m more aware now of who you are as a person, but... but if anything, I only adore you more. I adore you so much,” he lowers his voice slightly, “It doesn’t change the fact that I still want to be your boyfriend.”

Sapnap’s voice cracks, “Really?”

Karl nods.

“But only if *you’re* ready. *We* need to know that this is what *we* want.”

In that moment, Karl sits in the lap of a boy who has experienced so much nestled within him far beyond the surface. He peers into a face that has smiled thousands of times, and eyes that have cried seldomly. Before him is someone who gave so much back in repentance of an action long forgiven by a soul that tiptoes the earth in silence.

There, in the living room of a son and single mother’s house, in a neighborhood that familiar vehicles tired over and over again, in a town that less than of a quarter of a percent of the world knew about, were two teenage boys with heavy hearts that yearned for the other in more ways than could be counted on fingers alone.

“I’m ready, and I’m sure, before you ask,” Sapnap adds.

Karl nods softly, one hand that cups the other’s cheek dropping to his side, and the other traveling underneath his jaw.

“Then I think we’re both ready,” Karl whispers.

#### Chapter End Notes

Thank you.

I say it so many times, but it is remains the same if not bigger of a thank you. Thank you for being here, for being so patient and so kind to me while this chapter (and book) has been in the works. I’m so grateful to have such a wonderful audience that has been nothing but superb and thoughtful. Each one of you guys have pushed me to explore my writing and put out content that I never thought would reach as far as it has. So I offer my largest sum of gratitude I could possibly give out in this author’s note.

For those who have been gathering clues throughout this entire book, were you right? Did you guess this outcome? Let me know!

And just for the record, while it is taking me as long as Christ’s second coming to put out chapters, this book is NOT done. I *will* definitely be uploading chapters of them actually being together and happy. I swear to it.

Again, *thank you*.

(And to clear with any confusion, character! Sapnap DID NOT coerce character! Alex into anything sexual without consent. He only wanted the both of them to be publicly out in a relationship; please remember this is *just* a work of fiction)

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter :)

# Butterfly Wings

## Chapter Notes

TW // Anxiety, inner-monologue panic (NOT SEVERE)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They must have sat there for at least an hour, sitting in silence with one another. The calm rise and fall of their breaths followed in sync, heartbeats likewise, as the morning trailed on.

Karl remained in Sapnap's lap, pressed chest to chest and face curled up to the other's neck. The lingering, pulling scent of cedarwood and soft lavender entertained Karl—the familiarity grounding him.

Sapnap's hands trailed up and down Karl's sides slowly, applying enough pressure to remind the other that he was still there, but not enough to tickle him. His legs must've gone numb by now, yet Sapnap dared not to move.

It isn't until Karl's phone dings that he shifts slightly, lifting his resting head from Sapnap's shoulder to look behind him at his cellphone. The notification read that it had been from Niki, and the clock reminded him that he'd be off to her house rather soon-ish. He'd have to go, not out of obligation, but for his own sanity, even if part of him begged to remain where he was, safe and sound in Sapnap's presence.

Karl groans softly, twisting his spine back to face the other, looking into his hazel eyes. Karl repositions himself, shifting in his lap to face him properly. The other's hands stop running up and down his sides and instead find their way to Karl's own fingers, intertwining and clasping firmly. He yawns silently, feeling the weight of exhaustion seep into his muscles. His body had been now accustomed to less-than-adequate resting periods, and it didn't help that Sapnap's body was familiarly warm and comforting.

If he could, Karl would fall asleep in his arms. He just might too, if he isn't careful.

"You look tired," Sapnap mumbles, eyes bouncing about Karl's face. He feels it as much as he *looks* like it—the dark bags under his eyes and heavy limbs giving him away.

Karl nods, "I am, just a bit." A bit is more of an understatement.

Sapnap frowns slightly, using his free hand to brush some hair from his face. Karl was in a desperate need of a haircut, strands falling in front of his eyes all too often. *Later*, Karl notes.

"Be honest," Sapnap starts, voice deep, fingers trailing down his cheek, "these past days have been... rough, haven't they?"

A small sigh slips from between his lips. He won't lie to him, as if there was anything Karl wanted more than ever now—even the desire to sleep—was to be honest. So he's honest in his answer.

"Yes," Karl replies softly, "I was either sleeping or crying." It's nothing short of the truth, but it still sent pangs of guilt to Karl's chest.

Sapnap stays silent, studying his face, and gives a solemn nod. Karl believes that he knew regardless whether he told the truth or not—Karl wishes there was more to it though. Maybe not as dramatic, or perhaps not as deprecating as it sounds. Because it *had* been true, and it's the way it had gone whether or not Karl planned it to.

“I was confused,” Karl continues, averting his eyes in thought, “I couldn’t be mad at you. Not a single bit. I think I tried to... but I just couldn’t.” Karl exhales, sending another pulse in their hands. There were the words that Karl once had trouble expressing, but now... it comes easy. It all comes out easier than ever. “I just wanted to feel anything but the way I had felt, you know? Something I *knew* and not— not this *pain* that wouldn’t stop. I didn’t know why it hurt so much, being this upset.”

Sapnap nods stiffly. “I think you had every right to be upset,” he answers, choosing his words carefully. “I’m genuinely sorry. I know I can’t take back what happened, or erase the damage I caused, but I never meant to hurt you. Please know that I *never* meant to hurt you.”

There wasn’t a moment where Karl had believed that Sapnap intentionally meant to hurt him—there was nothing within him that could wield that much pain he felt, and truthfully, Karl doesn’t know how he could feel so much. It had just been so quick; the initial blow and short plummet into rock bottom, combined with his stubbornness to be alone, led him to believe this was the reason why it hurt so much. Whatever it was, no, it wasn’t Sapnap, at least, not entirely and certainly not out of his own free will.

Karl nods, “I know. You aren’t *cruel*, Sapnap.”

In the grand scheme of things though, Karl can’t help but think about how they fell into place. How the universe arranged the series of events that occurred that allowed each other to, one, meet; two, catch feelings for each other; and three, the discovery, rejection, and rejoicement between the two boys.

Their story was so convoluted, yet, Karl suspects that there had been no other route to take to be here. Perhaps it was fate, or maybe luck, or the butterfly effect repeating with each beat of its wings. Regardless, Karl still thinks that they had to endure what happened to reach this point in time with each other.

The tired boy sighs, sharing his thoughts, “I think it was inevitable though, what happened.”

“What do you mean?” Sapnap asks, his forehead creasing.

Karl shrugs, “We’re just *those* types of people. I... I overthink things and I’m awfully hesitant in many decisions I make. And you can see that. I’m an open book, and, well, you’re not.” He pauses. “You’re just more reserved—which is fine, I don’t expect you to tell me *everything* but with how we are, I just don’t see how this *couldn’t* have happened.”

Karl feels a bit... guilty. He’s only really thought of *himself* and how *he* feels, not once taking in account that perhaps Sapnap felt otherwise in the ordeal, and part of him feels upset at the fact that he hadn’t seen the signs earlier.

Sapnap visibly disagrees. He stiffens, “Sure... that’s one way to put it, but,” he stops to think some more. “I shouldn’t have decided anything for you; I should’ve told you this instead of pushing you away, then, we could’ve saved ourselves a whole lot of trouble.” He rubs his thumb over the top of Karl’s hand.

Karl shakes his head, “You don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to tell me or aren’t *ready* for.”

to tell me,” he frowns to himself, “I should’ve been patient, just like you’ve been with me.” The thought hits Karl hard. For someone who had the tendency to be so reticent, and so careful in what he does, he had never thought to incorporate how Sapnap felt about it all. It makes him feel so... selfish.

“This is different though,” Sapnap reasons, “I knew what I was being patient for. You didn’t.”

Karl presses his lips together. He understood what Sapnap meant—that Karl, himself, was already so wary of a relationship like this, and Sapnap knew of such hesitance. Still, he thinks to himself that he should’ve been more understanding during it all. Karl had made too many assumptions.

Sapnap was so good at noticing the slightest mood changes with Karl. In the little time they’ve known each other, Sapnap has memorized the way Karl acts. He had him down to the T, knowing when to push and when to step back. Sapnap held his hand every step of the way without fail or complaint.

Perhaps that bothered Karl the most from this episode. Sapnap has this ability with Karl, but Karl doesn’t. Yes, he might’ve been able to tell that Alex was a wound that never healed, but he never stopped to think that maybe this is why Sapnap had acted the way he had that night at his house.

In Karl’s spiral, he failed to recognize that there was something beyond the surface of simply ‘rejecting’ him. He wishes he would have looked past the feelings he had to see what was *really* the issue. Perhaps this wasn’t inevitable. Perhaps if Karl had just been more *patient*, more *understanding*, and less *scared* of something so *natural*, then he could’ve saved them from this downhill plummet. He should’ve known better. He should’ve-

“Karl,” Sapnap says, snapping him out of Karl’s descent into yet *another* spiral, “stop that. Stop thinking—look at me.”

Karl hadn’t noticed he had turned his gaze downwards. His eyes feel puddled, but his cheeks don’t feel wet at all.

“It’s not your fault you couldn’t read my mind, alright?” Sapnap offers a small smile, “You couldn’t have known unless I had *told* you. I gave you nothing to work with but all the reasons that I was ready for a relationship when I hadn’t... come to terms with my past. Which, still, I want to be with you. Really, I do.

“I’ve wanted to be with you since our dinner at Olive Garden. I wanted to know who Karl Jacobs is and how he could be equally smart *and* handsome. I want to know your past, present, and, if you ever let me, your future. I am in complete admiration of you, and I was, and still am, willing to watch you from afar until you are ready for me to come closer.”

Hearing his words forces a lump into Karl’s throat, not out of fear or distaste, but instead out of awe that someone could think of him in such a way. It’s overwhelming and settling all at once.

“You’re so honest with me. You told me you weren’t ready, and I respected that. I was willing to wait because I wanted to be with you no matter the cost. For as vulnerable as you were to me, I should’ve showed you the same. At least enough so that you aren’t the only one putting themselves on the line,” Sapnap sends pulses to their intertwined hands.

“Maybe if you had known, then you wouldn’t be beating yourself over this. But, listen to me,” Sapnap tilts the other’s head up using his pointer finger, “you *couldn’t* have known. Don’t feel guilty for not picking up on anything when I left nothing for you to pick up.”

“But you did,” Karl whispers, feeling ashamed, “I knew there was something up and I- I never bothered to ask-”

“Because you didn’t want to pry. That’s good, Karl. You allowed me to tell you when I was ready to tell you. I wish I had been ready to tell you a lot earlier, and I know I can’t rush the healing process, but Karl,” he squeezes his hand, “it’s not your fault. It’s mine.”

Karl can feel it now: a tear spills from his eye.

“Please don’t say that,” he nearly begs, “it’s not yours.”

Sapnap smiles, “Then you need to realize it’s not yours either.”

Karl sighs, using his sleeve on his other arm to wipe away his tear. “I just...” Karl pauses, choosing his next few words carefully, “feel so selfish.”

The older boy hums, pulling the other in closer to his chest. “Why?” He asks.

Karl sighs, melting into his touch, “It is for all the reasons you said not to feel sorry for when every bone in me says otherwise.”

His body still feels the pull of guilt. It’s constricting, and not at all kind to him. How could it be?

Sapnap rubs his back gently, tracing swirls and circles all about. “It’ll take time to heal,” he exhales deeply, “and I am willing to guide you every step of the way.”

Karl doesn’t answer him. His head feels all too full and heavy—so heavy, that he rests it on Sapnap’s shoulder physically to communicate that he’s done with the conversation. Karl doesn’t do so in vain, but rather as a symbol that they’ll return to it at another time. Perhaps when Karl is well and more stable, he can tackle the remnants of their discussion, but now, he only allows his body to go limp.

Sapnap seems to understand the gesture, hugging Karl tighter and staying relatively silent. It’s comforting, being wrapped in firm arms yet held so gently. It’s what he needs to clear his mind, at least, to help quiet down all the thoughts in Karl’s mind. He’s sure by the time his mind *does* clear up, Sapnap’s legs must be long gone into pins and needles.

Karl shifts slightly, attempting to sit up and pull his face away from the other’s shoulder. Sapnap loosens his grip on him and exhales as he too stretches slightly. As much as Karl wants to stay in his hold, he had made plans earlier in the day and he intends to keep his promises. It’s the best he can do after such a few hectic days.

“I have to go soon,” Karl admits gently, straightening his spine, “I’m supposed to see Niki and George today.”

Sapnap nods, “Then I’ll let you go.” He takes Karl’s hand and squeezes, “I’m sure they’re wanting to know everything.”

Karl frowns, remembering that they were left in the dark of everything that has happened in the past forty-eight hours. “They don’t... they don’t have to know *everything*.”

“I think they deserve to know the majority of it, this way they don’t *completely* hate my guts, you know?” Sapnap reasons, a chuckle hanging off his last word.

Karl shakes his head in disagreement, “They won’t. I won’t let them, not when... not when I know

you like I do now.”

“Then don’t let them, and tell them everything they need to know to make sure that they don’t,” Sapnap offers, “even if you have to tell them about Alex.”

Karl bites his lip. He knows that there’s a 99% chance that he won’t get away with just saying ‘we made up! Everything is okay now!’. Niki and George aren’t *stupid*.

Still, he feels like the story should be kept with Sapnap. It’s *his* story to tell.

Sapnap offers him a sympathetic smile, “I won’t be offended if you tell them, you know? All they know is that I hurt you, and I think that enough is hard to bounce back from.”

It’s harsh.

And it’s cruel.

Still, it’s true.

Niki and George would fight tooth and nail to protect him, and, even moreso, kill in Karl’s name if anyone *had* hurt him. Sapnap is right; they won’t be as forgiving as Karl was to Sapnap.

It’s Sapnap’s, though; it’s his past and present. It wasn’t Karl’s to tell.

“I can’t,” he whispers, “they’re just going to have to trust me when I say that I forgive you for worthy reasons.” Karl’s decided.

An inhale.

“I know you think that it would be wrong, but—”

“It *is* wrong.”

“Karl.”

“Sapnap.”

“You can tell them. I promise that I won’t hold it against you- or be upset, or mad,” Sapnap looks him in the eyes, “I swear.”

A large part of him wants to argue, to debate that it wasn’t fair. Nothing is ever fair.

Perhaps that’s why he doesn’t. For once in his life, he’ll accept defeat, pushing aside his stubbornness now when the time is right.

Sapnap has given him permission, and if Karl has learned anything in the last few hours, it is that he whole-heartedly trusts Sapnap. Their words are weighted, now more than ever.

“I’ll tell them if I absolutely have to, okay?” Karl compensates. Eventually, when the time is right, then he’ll go into it. Maybe when the wound isn’t as fresh as it is now stitched, he’ll be able to comfortably pass this story along.

Sapnap nods, understanding. “Just know that it’s okay with me to tell them.” he reminds him.

Karl smiles lightly, grabbing the other’s hand and squeezing gently.

“I know.”

Sapnap leaves soon after. There’s no hard feelings, no, there couldn’t be. He leaves content, trusting that Karl truly forgives him.

Karl stood at his porch, waving off the boy as he drove out of the neighborhood. Mr. Watson was outside too, but only offered a nod to Karl. It was enough said.

Once inside, Karl grabs what he needs before heading his way to Niki’s. A newfound nervousness settles at the pool of his stomach. It was a different type of worry, and Karl had not a clue as to what the next hour or so had in store.

When he arrives, there’s an empty space in her driveway for him to pull up in. He does so, exiting and clicking his keys before walking to her door.

Niki’s house was never short of anything but welcoming. Red-bricked and chimney topped, her little home abode enticed him with the smell of old books and apple-cinnamon. She was an old soul, perhaps on her seventh or eighth life out of the metaphorical nine, and enjoyed the more simple things in life. Niki is walking wisdom, and her house reflected likewise.

He rings the doorbell.

Karl can feel the same off-settling feeling he had the night he stood on Sapnap’s porch. His hands shook and his chest felt oddly tight. The anxiety of having to face his friends was now catching up to him, and he felt drawn to hopping back into his car and scurrying off back home.

He takes a deep breath, curling his hands into fists. He can do this—Karl Jacobs is not scared of his friends or what he has to say to them. Nervous? Sure, but not scared. Karl Jacobs is *not* scared.

He exhales.

The door opens.

Behind it, a doe-eyed Niki and sympathy-smiled George stand in the doorway.

Karl can feel a lump form in his throat. He tries to say something, anything... but his mouth is stuffed with cotton and his legs are glued to the unforgiving cement of Niki’s porch.

It’s too familiar now.

He feels like he could collapse at any moment.

And he thinks he will, if not for the other two swooping him up in the tightest hug he’s ever known to receive from anyone other than his own mother.

It’s the warm embrace Karl needed after a few long days—days of tears and exhaustion. They say nothing, only clutching Karl tightly as if it were their last hug on Earth. It’s a squeeze of life. A reminder, perhaps, that they were his two bestest friends that would do anything for him. He’s loved and cherished.

A minute or two later of synchronized swaying, the three pull apart. One deep breath, and they’re making their way to the couch; Niki’s offering a warm mug of hot cocoa and George fumbling for the remote before playing soft, classical music. It feels like home.

“Thank you,” Karl says, accepting the snowman mug.

Niki smiles in return, “you look like you needed one.” She takes a seat next to him on the couch, a fair amount of distance between the two.

George sits on the other couch, but still faces Karl. He sits patiently, as though he were waiting for Karl to take the stage. They fall into a soft silence, and Karl sips a bit of his cocoa before speaking.

Clearing his throat and setting the cup down, he says, “I just want to say I’m sorry before anything.” He swallows. “I’m sorry for going cold turkey and MIA on the two of you—I wasn’t in the right mind to... to let anyone in just yet.”

Niki nods gently, “We figured you needed time.”

George adds, “You would come to us when you were ready. I think- I think it’s fair to need to step away. It’s only human.”

Karl sighs softly, “The way I handled it wasn’t the best. A text saying any of that could’ve been much better than ignoring you two.” He winces.

The boy beside him rolls his eyes playfully, “The past is past. Now you know how to handle it better. Besides, think of it as a... I don’t know... learning experience.”

Karl blinks, eyebrows furrowing. “Right... right, a learning experience,” he repeats. The words feel awkward in his mouth.

“Exactly! A learning experience,” George extends, “I think it’s better than what it feels like.”

Niki coughs, “I think what George is trying to say is that we can only grow from here. There’s only one way left to go, and that’s up.”

“Get it, because you hit rock bottom,” George clarifies, nodding his head and smiling.

Karl breathes briefly through his nose in a slight laughter. “Thank you, George.”

“You’re welcome!”

Niki stage whispers to him, “Just ignore him.”

Karl nods gently. He takes a shuddering breath. “Like I said, I just wanted to say sorry. I’m really, really sorry.”

He looks at the two of them, noting their expressions. He was expecting something more, something of disgust or cruelty but... it isn’t there. He doesn’t know why he would expect such a thing from them, but something in his stomach and mind tell him that they would be disappointed. His mind tends to play tricks on him now though.

“We forgive you whole-heartedly,” George concludes bluntly. “I speak on behalf of myself and Niki when I say that.”

Karl looks at Niki for confirmation.

“I forgive you,” she says, genuinely. Her eyes crinkle in a sweet smile, and a small nod clarifies her statement.

Karl doesn’t think he’s ever felt more relief in his life. It feels like a weight’s been lifted off his

shoulders—a knee-cracking, back-aching weight.

However, Karl knows what is to come. This would be the harder part, the one that might not be as forgiving or kind.

“I think it’s only fair that I tell you… tell you what happened,” he says, clearing his throat, “because you guys deserve it. You deserve it all.”

Niki smiles, putting her hand over his gently, “If you’re ready, then go ahead. If you’re not, you don’t have to say anything at all.”

George scoots over towards him, “Ditto, don’t feel like you have to say something just because we’re your best friends. We’ll always be by your side no matter what, regardless of if you tell us or not.”

It’s perhaps the most intelligent thing George has ever said in his seventeen years of life, and Karl can’t exactly tell if it had been rehearsed hours previously or not, but it’s enough to cause tears to well up in his eyes.

What did he do to deserve them?

After all this time, through high school and it all; how did he win the friend lottery with these two? And since when did George say anything remotely heartwarming without making Karl roll his eyes in response?

George gasps when he looks at Karl’s face. “Don’t cry! Please don’t cry! Fuck, Niki, you made him cry.”

“I made him cry?”

“Yes, *you* made him cry!”

Karl laughs wetly, wiping his eyes with his sleeves. He coughs, “No! No—oh my god, why am I crying?”

George tackles him in a hug, wrapping his arms around him tightly as so to suffocate the tears within Karl. “I’m sorry the old hag made you cry,” he apologizes, glaring at Niki jokingly.

The “old hag” in question rolls her eyes, scooting closer to Karl and running her fingers in his hair. “Don’t listen to him. You can cry if you want to, but on your own accord. Not mine, nor George’s; your own, or else I’ll cry for making you cry and then give George something to cry about.”

George winces in the slight threat before loosening his death grip on Karl’s body. He pulls away, smiling gently and pressing his wrists against the stray tears down the other’s neck.

“I’m okay, sorry- *god*, I just got so emotional again,” Karl apologizes, sniffling. “I just really appreciate you two.”

Niki’s eyes crinkle with her grin. She grabs his hand, “Here for you always.”

Karl inhales, gathering himself again. He decides that they should know—that he’d rather it be now than later or perhaps even never.

“I told him…” he looks down at his hands, sniffling, “I told him that I really liked him and that… that I wanted to be more than… whatever we were.”

The other two are silent, only a small hum from George.

“I showed up to his house in the pouring rain. It was dumb, doing it all on a whim. I had to though, if not then, I didn’t know when I’d get the courage to do something like that again.”

Karl pauses, swallowing harshly.

“I told my mom before coming. She’s the one who actually helped me figure it all out, you know. She’s just good like that. She didn’t like that I was going so late, but I think she knew. She knew that I had to do it then, so she let me go.”

Niki smiles gently, “Your mom always knows. Even when she’s not around, I swear she knows.”

Karl lets out a small chuckle, “Mom superpowers I guess.” He continues.

“Anyways, I showed up at his door, and he let me in. Gave me a whole lecture on why I should’ve texted him beforehand. He wouldn’t have let me drive out there like that, and now I know why but...” he pauses again, wondering if he let on too much. The other two don’t question it.

“But anyways, I told him. Lots of beating around the bush, but eventually, I told him I wanted to be *his*,” Karl sighs, “and he told me I wasn’t ready yet.”

George furrows his eyebrows, “So you told him everything he’s been *dying* to hear and he just... shuts it down? Like that?”

Karl tilts his head from side to side, “Sort of. That wasn’t even the part that hurt the most. I *knew* what I wanted, but it was him. He kept saying ‘we need time to think’ or ‘we need to make sure this is what we want,’ you know, all this *we* as if *I* didn’t already know.”

“Then I realized it was him. *He* wasn’t ready. I was angry, mostly because I thought he didn’t trust me when in fact he did, it was just that he was still...” *mourning*, but Karl doesn’t say such.

“He was still figuring it out himself. I stormed off like a little first grader and drove home. Ran in, cried to my mom, and fell asleep in the midst of it all. I was upset and hurt and I didn’t know how to handle it.”

Karl shakes his head slightly, “So I ignored everyone. Thankfully, it was only for a day because Sapnap texted saying he was stopping by the next morning whether or not I liked it. He kind of saved me from spiraling, I guess. A little bit too dramatic for my taste, but it is what it is.”

That warrants a little giggle to escape George’s mouth, followed with a sharp slap from Niki, and a trailing “ow!” and “sh!” Karl almost finds it within him to laugh along, but he doesn’t.

“He came over, told me a few things that... that I won’t say because it’s his story, but when I say that I forgive him and that I’m not angry anymore, I mean it,” Karl looks at George and Niki straight in the eye, “he had his reasons, and you know, maybe the way he—*we*, handled it wasn’t the greatest, but despite that, I forgive him.”

Niki clears her throat, “Well, if you forgive him, then we have no choice but to do so as well. Mark my words, Karl, if he *ever* makes you cry like that ever again, George and I, we are getting more involved.”

George adds on, “One hundred percent. I don’t care that I’m dating his best friend- you come first, Karl. Not some pretty boy on our high school football team, you, *you come first*.”

Karl nods in agreement, sniffing. “I know, and- and so do you guys. You will always come first too.”

George snorts, “I sure hope so.” It isn’t malicious, only sarcastic.

“I assume you two are now… well, I know you’re not the biggest fan of labels but” Niki alludes, looking at Karl now.

The boy bites his lip, “We never officially said anything, but we’re more than what we were before so…”

George offers a small smile, “Good. Because if we went through all of this for you two to go back to square one, then I think I would have gone crazy.”

Niki smacks his arm yet again, “Hush. We’re happy for you, Karl, seriously. More than happy. My threat still stands, but all in all, we’re really proud of you.”

Karl nods.

“Thank you.”

The rest of his visit dwindles down to a movie and popcorn. Granted, they more or less ignored the movie and talked about other things like how George was in the middle of a makeout with Dream when Sapnap had called, and how he held his ear to Dream’s bathroom door the second he heard Sapnap say ‘Karl’. He claims he didn’t *want* to be nosy, but he’d do anything to hear any progression between Karl and Sapnap. Plus, according to George, the phone call was frantic, and George was more concerned than anything.

He apologizes for if he overstepped, but Karl waves it off, claiming that he would’ve done the same if he were in George’s position.

Niki tells him about how the main hall was going to be under construction due to the water damage. She only knows because her dad works for the city, but apparently, it looked like they’d be off of school for a few more days. George shouts in joy upon hearing that, claiming he *still* hasn’t finished one of his assignments in his biology class. Karl rolls his eyes upon hearing so.

Karl goes home after a few hours. The other two send him a farewell, George opting to keep Niki company while her family is out. Karl decided it was about time he headed home and saw his mother.

He hasn’t been the best son these last few days, and he could, at the very least, tell her thank you.

At home, he’s able to clean up the little mess he’s made in the living room before she walks through the front door.

Immediately, he goes to hug her.

“Ooph! It’s good to see you too Karl,” she says chuckling. She sets her bags onto the floor to return the hug, “hey kiddo.”

He holds on tightly, embracing her with as much force and energy as others had embraced him earlier today. The lingering scent of rubbing alcohol and rubber gloves remains on her uniform, but beneath it, he recognizes the dandelion scent from their wash. She is from the blooming meadows

and crystal lakes—of that between twin peaks and dense forest. It's refreshing, even if masked with icky-hospital smells.

Karl kisses her cheek, “Thank you. Thank you for the soup, the comfort, you know, all of it these past few days.” The words rush from his mouth; too many ‘thank you’s for him to count.

She smiles, brushing the hair from his eyes, “It’s what mothers are for, Karl. Are you okay? Did you work everything out or...”

Karl nods, drawing away from her to allow her to properly put her items away and take off her jacket. “Kind of.”

“Kind of?”

He sighs, leaning against the railing of the stairs next to the door and coat rack. “Sapnap came over this morning.”

She clicks her tongue, putting up her warm jacket and stepping out of her slip-grade shoes, “Did he now?”

“Yeah. He came to talk about... everything, I guess.” He says carefully.

“Did you make up? We aren’t anti-Sapnap now or are we?” She asks, turning around, hoisting her bag over her shoulder.

*Anti-Sapnap*, it’d be a lot more funnier if not the given situation. Karl shakes his head, “No. I forgave him.” She raises an eyebrow at this. Karl backtracks slightly, “For a good reason. I’ll- I’ll tell you about it during dinner, okay? Promise.”

She gives him a certain look before nodding. “Well then, we’ll talk about it over dinner. To be honest, I didn’t have any plans for tonight... Do you want to order out tonight?”

Karl almost nods when he remembers that he had pulled out some chicken prior to leaving for Niki’s. He shakes his head, “No, I’ll make something real quick. There’s chicken thawing in the sink.”

“Are you sure?” She asks, facing Karl.

Karl nods, “I don’t mind. Besides, you made dinner last night.”

She smiles, “Alright. I’ll go take a shower then.”

And so Karl whips up a quick sweet and sour chicken and fried rice meal while his mother takes a well-deserved shower. He’s placing the full plates onto the placemats on the table when she walks down the stairs, her hair up in a towel and body dressed in her comfy pajamas. Her eyebags are dark and puffy, no doubt from a long, hard day at work. Sometimes, Karl wishes he could take her place for once.

They both take a seat, his mother hungrily taking a bite of the meal.

“Wait! It’s-”

Karl doesn’t have a chance to finish his sentence when she opens her mouth, forcing the food to, unceremoniously, fall from her mouth and plop back onto her plate.

“Why didn’t you tell me it was hot!” She scolds playfully, wiping her mouth with a napkin and

fanning herself.

Karl rolls his eyes, “I was trying to, you know. I thought it was rather obvious too, you know, the steam from the plate.”

His mother shakes her head, “Gah, undermining me now too? Shame on you.”

They both share a laugh before blowing gently on their spoons. They sit there and eat for a while, Karl asking about how work went and his mother reviewing stories of the day. They mostly concern the prior storm, but nothing too serious.

“So,” Karl’s mother is halfway through her plate now, “tell me. What happened?”

Karl sighs, sipping his water from his cup, “A lot.”

He tells her everything he told Niki and George, only this time, he offers more.

Although he said he didn’t want to tell Sapnap’s story, he figures his mother was the only exception. It was his mom, and he didn’t have to worry about her saying anything to anyone else. That was probably one of his greatest concerns.

“His ex-boyfriend got in an accident while driving to see him. It was storming too, so... so he was partially scared about that,” Karl recollects, gathering some rice onto his spoon, “that freaked him out the most, I think.”

His mother frowns, “I’m sorry... that sounds awful. I can’t imagine how his parents must’ve felt, knowing that their son... their son wasn’t coming home that night.” She shivers, shaking her head, “I don’t know what I would’ve done.”

Karl hadn’t thought about it like that. It brought more of a perspective now comparing it to his night a few days prior.

“I won’t do that again,” Karl says, biting his lip, “drive in the rain so carelessly.”

His mother nods in agreement, “Damn right, you won’t. You’re all I have left, you know.”

She says it so calmly, and so... loosely like that. Karl’s known that he was it for her—the last bit of family she practically had. No uncles, no aunts, not even grandparents. Sure, his father’s parents were out there somewhere, but they weren’t close to the Jacobs. Karl was it.

“I know,” he says dryly.

A small silence overtakes the conversation. The sound of spoons and forks clinking against ceramic plates fill the space.

“Was that all then?” His mother asks, “Is that why he said you weren’t ready yet?”

Karl tilts his head from side to side in thought, “Not really, it was mostly because wanted to be more public with his boyfriend- ex-boyfriend. Alex didn’t want to, so they broke up over it. It was mutual, he said, but... but still. I think Sapnap was just scared about pressuring me into something like that.”

Karl’s mom nods, “I get that. That’s kind of him for thinking about you like that. I only want the very best for you, my dear, and any boy that is as thoughtful as he is, even if his past isn’t all that great, shows a lot. Shows growth, and reflection, and a whole lot of consideration for his loved

ones, you know?"

*Loved ones.*

It makes Karl's face break out in a grin for once, not being so scared of it anymore.

"Right."

"So, I can assume I'll be seeing him for dinner sometime soon, correct? I need to really know who it is who makes you feel the way you do," his mother teases, finishing off her plate.

Karl blushes bashfully, "Mom!"

"What?" She asks playfully, "I'm just being honest. Besides, I haven't had the honor of showing your baby pictures to anyone yet."

Karl groans and hides behind his hands, "Mom, *please*. I won't invite him over if you keep teasing me like that." His cheeks feel hot from embarrassment. She only laughs in response and stands up before picking up both of their plates.

"Fine, I won't," She answers, walking into the kitchen. Karl puts his hands down and shakes his head to himself.

"I'll believe it when he actually *does* come over," Karl remarks, getting up from his own chair. He hears the plates and forks clink against each other in the sink, as well as the rush of water from the faucet.

His mother scrubs the dishes in a small 'thank you' for dinner. "So this *does* mean he's coming over then, right?"

Karl turns around to face her. "Of course."

A yawn erupts from his throat, signaling the end of his own day and the exhaustion creeping into his limbs once again. It had been a long day.

"Go to bed, dear," His mother offers, shutting off the water and placing the dishes onto their drying rack, "you look awful."

Karl rolls his eyes playfully, but nonetheless agrees. He's kissing her cheek goodnight and making his way across the living room to the stairs when she calls for him again.

"Hey Karl?"

"Yes?" He answers from the bottom of the stairs.

"I love you."

He exhales with a small grin.

"I love you too."

Chapter End Notes

I'm not going to be *that* ao3 author that apologizes profusely for leaving a fic for so long and returning after the most traumatic events in her life-mostly because these past few months haven't been *that* awful despite my tweets claiming they were. However, I *will* express my deepest condolences for taking so long to put this out.

If you're not following my Twitter (which, shame on you, go follow it now @VeeBeeTea), then you probably are unaware of where I've been and what's been going on. To be fair, I haven't exactly explained all that much in my tweets, other than that I've been busy and struggling, yet, I digress.

I update this book today as a graduated senior on her way to college in the upcoming fall. Never thought I'd make it this far, but whoopie! This year has been utter *hell*, but hey, we did it! I also stand today with a bittersweet farewell to the MCYT community as I've grown out of this phase. This community has treated me well and I cannot express my gratitude towards the people I've met and creators I've watched for hours. It is just that I have simply moved on.

Regardless of my position within the fandom, I plan on finishing this book this summer. I have time now and a newfound motivation to write a few more times with the characters I've created. I love them now as much as I did back then.

Thank you. The biggest thank you goes to the readers; past, present, and even future readers-thank you. I could not have done *any* of this without you guys, so thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

As always leave a comment or kudos - subscribe to the work or myself for notifications, and I will see you all in the next chapter :)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!